



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

HD WIDENER



HJ HJBK U



HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
GIFT OF
DANIEL B. FEARING
CLASS OF 1882 · A. M. 1911
OF NEWPORT
1915
THIS BOOK IS NOT TO BE SOLD OR EXCHANGED

Went.
H. J.

HIGHLAND SPORT



HIGHLAND SPORT

BY

A. GRIMBLE

AUTHOR OF

"DEERSTALKING," "SHOOTING AND SALMON FISHING," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

ARCHIBALD THORBURN

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LD

1894

F520 5.56/F

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
GIFT OF
DANIEL B. FEARING
30 JUNE 1919

LONDON :
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

PREFACE.

THE first visit I ever paid to the Highlands was to Ederline House on Loch Awe, in the spring of 1857. Since those days I have rarely missed passing spring and autumn in the North, while to this day there remains with me the almost passionate fondness inspired by that early visit for the beauties and sports of the hills, lochs and rivers of the bonnie country.

This book contains then a selection from a series of episodes which have presented themselves to me since making my first appearance north of the Tweed. Only the most interesting incidents have been chosen for narration, and the greater part of them have happened in places where I formed one of the party, while only a few have come to my

knowledge by hearsay, or by my being on the spot shortly afterwards.

It is almost needless to state that in "A Month at Strathmaacoe" and "Two Months on Speyside," the events of many years in many places have been crowded into a short period.

With regard to the names I have used, they are nearly all imaginary ones, but as it is difficult to avoid hitting on any to which there never have been claimants, I beg to assure all those in the possession of any such patronymics as have been used that nothing herein is in any way intended to apply to them

The chapter on "Salmon" is an expression of my own views, arranged together with those of many others better able to form opinions on the subjects discussed. Certain it is that great numbers of people other than mere anglers hold the idea that "something" should be done to ensure more profitable netting and better angling results than the past three years have shown.

Twenty-five years ago I believe I was one of the first to raise the cry of a close time for trout in Scotland, and since then I have never ceased "pegging away" at the idea, until at last, thanks to Lord Lamington's recent Bill, the trout close time has become a reality across the Border, while the mere fact that what I advocated so long ago is now the law of the land inspires me to suggest other fish problems which I feel convinced are likely to prove equally as correct. Therefore I write in the hopes of, sooner or later, seeing the ancient Salmon Fisheries Act of 1861 overhauled and revised. I say ancient because in these go-ahead days a lapse of more than thirty years will make nearly any Act of Parliament appear old, for although there was another Act of 1868, followed by the Fishery Board for Scotland Act in 1882, neither one nor the other seriously altered the main points of the 1861 Act.

During these thirty years the sea and river nets have been largely increased in their numbers, while

vast improvements have been made in the methods of working them ; likewise, for every salmon angler of a quarter of a century ago there are now at least a dozen, and these three facts alone demand the attention of our fishery legislators.

Having said thus much, I will bring this preface to a close, and trust the perusal of these pages may afford some of my readers a tithe of the pleasure I have found in putting them together, for thereby have been revived reminiscences of many happy bygone days and kindly recollections of dear old comrades. Alas! that so many of the best and the truest should sleep without breathing, so to their cherished memories and the days of auld lang syne I dedicate these pages.

A. GRIMBLE.

UNION CLUB,
BRIGHTON.
October, 1894.

LIST OF CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFACE	ix
CHAPTER I.—MURDOCH CAMPBELL'S REVENGE	1
„ II.—THE MONNIELACK SHOOTINGS .	19
„ III.—TWO MONTHS ON SPEYSIDE .	45
„ IV.—A MONTH AT STRATHMAACOE .	72
„ V.—SALMON	167
„ VI.—SOME REMARKS ON THE FORE- GOING CHAPTERS	240

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
RABBIT ISLE	6
THE TWELFTH.	28
GAFFING THE FORTY-POUNDER	70
EAGLE AND GROUSE	80
A ONE-GUN GROUSE DRIVE.	112
DEATH OF THE THIRTEEN-POINTER	130
"CRUACHAN" AND THE TEN-POINTER	146
LONG ODDS ON THE BLACKCOCK	158
THE BIRTH-PLACE OF THE FIFTY-FOUR-POUNDER	169
A WEST COAST SCENE	252

HIGHLAND SPORT.

CHAPTER I.

MURDOCH CAMPBELL'S REVENGE.

ONE Easter, some twenty years ago, I received an invitation from my old friend Murdoch Campbell to come to him for a month at Marathon House, situated on the wild west coast of Scotland, somewhere between Crinan and Strome Ferry.

From youth up I had been devoted to rod and gun, and hence, in those days, my attention had been somewhat ardently turned to pigeon shooting, an amusement which was then far more fashionable and less business-like than it is now.

In the period to which this story belongs the licence to kill game expired on the last day of the

shooting season; the ten-shilling gun licence was also in existence, and a report had been spread abroad that the excise officers contemplated a raid on the members of the Gun Club and Hurlingham, with the object of fining all those who were not provided with the necessary authority to use a gun, while certain it is that had they done so they would have made a rich haul. Thus some of us had already taken out game licences for that year, for it made us safe, and it was but parting with three pounds a few months before the usual time. Therefore, when Easter arrived, I started for Marathon Cottage in possession of a game licence, which, as the sequel will show, was of more service to me in the West Highlands than at the Gun Club grounds in West London.

In those days there was no railroad either to Oban or Strome Ferry, so making my way by the night express to Greenock, the remainder of the journey was done by steamer, and the following evening found me safely at my destination.

Marathon Cottage was a comfortable stone-built building, situated about a hundred feet above the sea, and about a hundred yards from the shore. It had been built for himself by the happy possessor of the Murdoch estate, for the big house on the property, which was placed in a hole near a swamp, was rarely occupied by the owner, and more often than not was let with most of the shooting to a gentleman from Manchester.

Murdoch Campbell was a fine specimen of a black Highlander—standing six foot in his stockings, he was still in his thirties, was forty-four inches round the chest, and possessed arms and legs of prodigious strength. Moreover he was as lean as a deerhound and nearly as active; crisp, curling, jet-black hair entirely covered his head, while from under a white forehead and thick, black eyebrows shone a pair of the brightest dark-grey eyes. The rest of his face was tanned and weather-beaten, while both his high cheekbones were cherry red. A large black moustache with a beard trimmed to a point, all

combined to make him a remarkable and striking-looking personage.

Born of an ancient race of chieftains who, as long as there was fighting to be done, had ever been in the thick of it, and not always on the winning side, the more recent of these warriors had in 1715 and in "forty-five" so impoverished the estate that at the time of this story Murdoch had been reluctantly compelled to let the greater part of his shootings. Adored by his people, no kinder-hearted man breathed than my friend, and, devoted to sport of all kinds, he was ever a most cheery, pleasant companion.

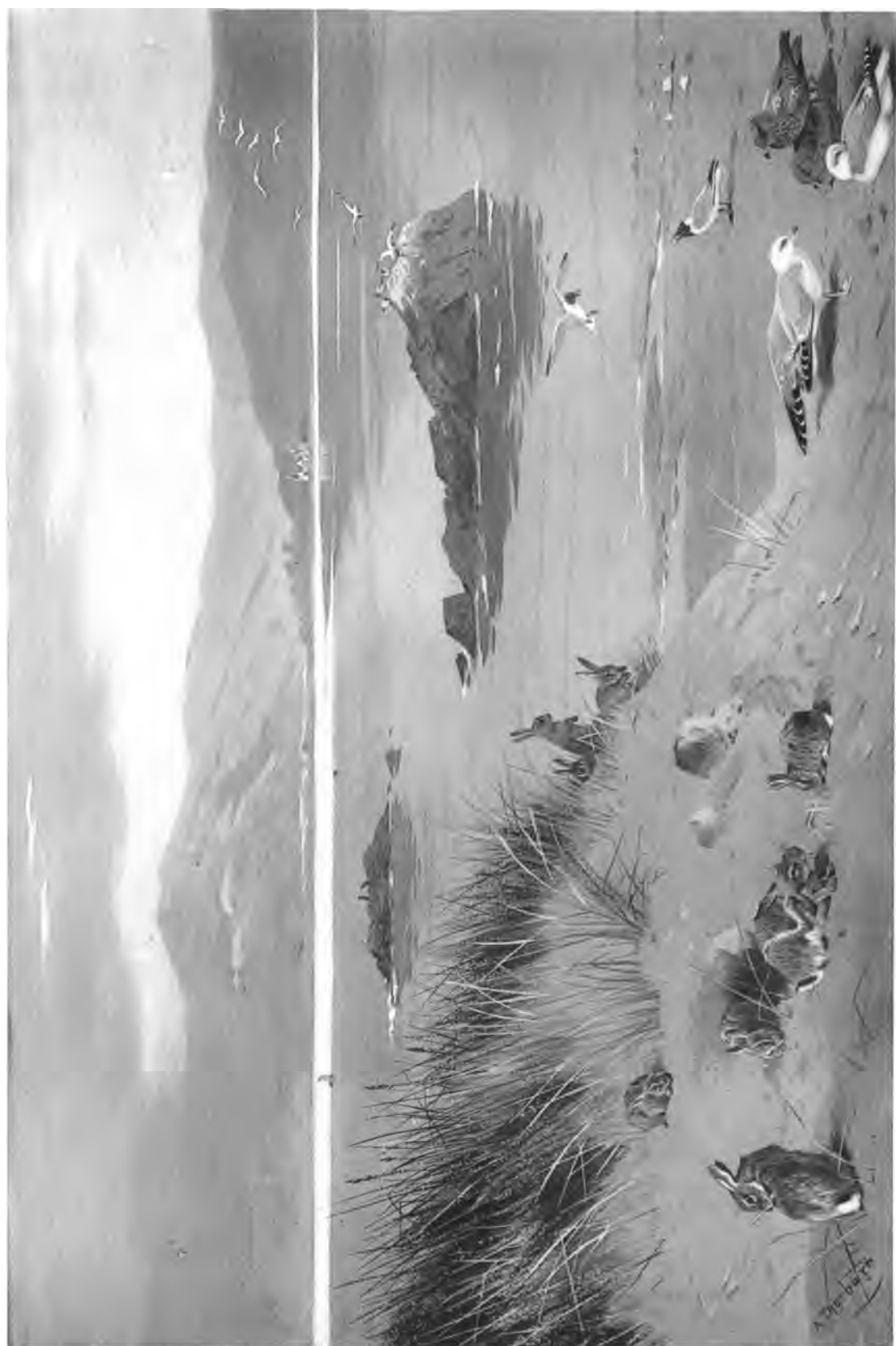
His cottage he had christened Marathon, because he had learnt in his school-days, with much trouble, from Xenophon that "Marathon looked on the sea and the hills looked on Marathon;" and he openly avowed that that passage and sundry swishings were all the recollections of the distinguished Athenian warrior and sportsman that now dwelt in his memory.

From the cottage windows could be seen a wide expanse of sea dotted with islands of various sizes, which picturesque combination of land and water supplied us with scenes of beauty and realms of sport; sometimes it was the seal or the otter that claimed our attention, at others the fish, while once we even joined in a whale hunt which ended in nothing. We tried for an early salmon in the river hard by, and many a tramp was made, rod in hand, across the moor to distant hill lochs, while for a wonder the weather had served us so well, that for a whole week no rain had marred our enjoyment.

Then one morning a shepherd brought a note from the factor of the adjoining property to ask us if we would like to go and thin down the rabbits on Innis Coinean—which is the Gaelic for Rabbit Isle—which lay some five miles off Marathon Bay, and was one of the most exposed of the group. The letter concluded by saying, "Please don't spare the bunnies; they were not properly

shot down in the winter, so if you do not care to go, I must send over and trap them, or there won't be a blade of grass left on the island." As we decided to go, Murdoch turned to me and said, "Should you mind if I asked the exciseman from Laggan to come with us? He's not a bad sort of fellow, a capital shot, and handy too in a boat."

Of course I assented, so a letter was at once despatched to the official in question, asking him to meet us at the Marathon boat-house the day but one following. At the appointed hour our friend duly arrived at the trysting-place; our three selves, Murdoch's head man, and two under-keepers with their ferrets, made up the party. The day was fine and the sea so smooth that we soon pulled over the five miles of water between us and the sandy beach of Innis Coinean, which, unlike all the other islands adjacent, was totally devoid of rock, and was but some three hundred acres of sand-land, most of it standing but a little above sea-level, while its whole surface was covered with sweet,



thick-growing grass, and hither in summer sheep were brought by boats to graze. To the humble bunny it was little short of a paradise; for there were no four-footed vermin on the island, while the feeding was splendid, with the easiest of burrowing, and what more could the mind of the most epicurean rabbit wish for?

As soon as we had landed and made all secure, each of us, accompanied by a man, went off in different directions, having previously agreed to rendezvous at the boat for luncheon. Sport was good and the firing rapid. The lion's share fell to my lot, so thus, twenty minutes before lunch-time, my man had more bunnies to carry than he could manage, and, unloading my gun, I took part of the burden, as we made for the boat.

On the way we fell in with the exciseman, who in reply to our cry of, "Well! what sport?" answered, "Oh, very good indeed, and well worth the ten-shilling gun-licence I took out yesterday!" I laughed at his business-like response, and told

him under what circumstances I already had taken out, not only a gun, but a game licence.

A short half-hour was all Murdoch allowed us for refreshment; then we started shooting again, and when the sun began to set we counted into the boat nearly three hundred bunnies, and, large as the total seemed, it was yet clear that it would take other visits to effectually thin them down.

Some few days after this trip we returned from a seal hunt earlier than usual, having been driven off the sea by a heavy storm. As we were both cold and wet through, I made straight for my bedroom, where I knew there would be a good fire with a hot tub; but Murdoch, with a Scotchman's contempt of a wet jacket, and in spite of wise counsel from me, turned into the dining-room to look at the contents of the post-bag.

Just as I was undressed I heard the front door bell ring, which was a very rare occurrence at Marathon Cottage, and usually betokened a telegram or a call from the "meenister" or the doctor.

Shortly afterwards I heard Murdoch's hasty tread on the stairs, his approach being heralded by various Gaelic utterances which it needed no Gaelic scholar to interpret as curses loud and deep.

My room door was banged open by my host, and in the lightest of garments I stood awaiting an explanation, for clearly Murdoch was most angrily excited; the veins on his white forehead were swollen and stood out quite blue, the dark-grey eyes flashed, while his left hand held at arm's length a blue paper, which he threatened with the right fist as he strode towards me. In reply to my "What on earth's the matter, Murdoch?" there burst from him a torrent of imprecations: "Brute—cur—mean rascally scoundrel—I'll break every bone in his body!" and how long this would have continued I know not, but creating a diversion by snatching the blue paper out of his hand, I soon saw that it was a summons to appear before the Laggan magistrates on a charge of using a gun

without a licence, while the information had been laid by our late friend and guest the rabbit-shooting exciseman!

I could not help laughing, which made Murdoch the more furious, and not until I had followed up my mirth by saying, "Well, I never did hear of a dirtier trick than that!" did he at all regain his wonted equanimity. At this period of our discussion I was warned by a freezing sensation that, as far as I was concerned, it would be wiser to continue it when I was better clad and Murdoch in a righter mind. So asking him to take pity on me, and remember his own wet clothes as well, I persuaded him to go to his room with a promise that we would devote the evening to forming plans of vengeance. I was soon meditating on the matter, from the seat of a cosy arm-chair pulled up to the peat fire of the dining-room, the while from the upper stories descended through the floor a rumbling as of distant thunder, which was the safety-valve of Murdoch's rage

relieving itself in furious mutterings against the treacherous exciseman.

All that evening we thrashed out various plots for vengeance on the traitor. At first Murdoch vowed that he would take no notice of the summons, but would next day seek out the informer and flog him. I pointed out that he would only put himself in the wrong by setting the law at defiance, while, as Mr. Exciseman stood but just over five feet, and weighed some three stone less than his would-be punisher, there would also be but little credit to be gained by taking the law into his own hands. As we each sat smoking by the side of the good peat fire, each cudgelled his brains for a means of crying quits with our friend, and bit by bit we hatched a plot; it was almost a forlorn hope, but the best we could devise.

It "came off," however. Silly vanity on one side with good acting on our parts did the trick. It was as follows, then, that we set to work. On the day fixed for hearing the summons we drove into

Laggan, Murdoch taking with him many old game licences to show that he had never hitherto failed to fulfil his duty in this respect. The case was heard, and lasted but a short time; the exciseman swore to the facts "most reluctantly, and actuated solely by a feeling of duty," so he said, while the magistrates expressed their regret to Murdoch that the law left them no option but to impose a small fine, which was at once paid, and the case ended.

Making our way through the people to Mr. Exciseman, who watched our approach somewhat anxiously, we both neared him with smiling faces and outstretched hands, while as soon as Murdoch was close enough he patted him on the back and complimented him on the part he had played.

"You are just a brave man, and have but done your duty by the laws of the land, not permitting private friendship to stand in the way." So said Murdoch, while I followed suit to the same purpose.

Our friend seemed highly delighted at the turn things had taken, so when Murdoch proposed an adjournment to the hotel with an invitation to our man to partake of lunch, the offer was promptly accepted, and in a whiskey and soda Murdoch pledged his guest. "Here's to your speedy preferment, Mr. Exciseman. Such zeal for the service as you have shown will not, I'm sure, be allowed to go unrewarded when the facts of the case reach head-quarters."

The wretched man flushed with pleasure at this toast, as he replied, "That's right good hearing, Mr. Campbell, and I'm glad you bear me no ill-will."

"Pooh!" said Murdoch, "the whole thing comes to a fine not worth the mentioning, and the having to take out a game licence at once instead of in August. Now what say you to another day at the rabbits on Innis Coinean to-morrow?"

To our astonishment and delight the invitation was accepted, and early the next day our friend appeared

once more at Marathon Lodge. We were soon afloat, with our exciseman at the bow oar, while behind him was deposited the luncheon-basket neatly covered with a white cloth, from beneath which stretched the necks of several black bottles, for the small solitary spring on Innis Coinean yielded but a scant supply of very bad water, while in times of drought its locality was only to be discovered by the extra length and greenness of the grass around it. On the top of the lunch-basket the boat's painter was neatly coiled.

The sea was like a millpond, and as we came close to the island's sandy shore, Murdoch cried to Mr. Exciseman, "As you are sitting forward, just take the lunch-basket in one hand with the painter in the other and jump ashore and fasten us to the big stone with the ring in it," and as our keel grounded on the sand our man did as he was asked. As he stooped to secure the rope to the ring, we shoved off again, while the boat end of the painter, purposely untied beforehand

flopped into the water as had been intended, and ere the trapped one turned round we were already clear of the shore, and the position was not realised by him until Murdoch called out, "Now good-bye, false friend and treacherous guest; you are paid out in your own coin, so may a day or two in solitude and fasting take some of the misplaced zeal out of you."

In vain the wretched exciseman begged us to return. Off we pulled, and began to trail for saithe round the island. This we did for fear that any passing fishing boat should rescue our captive, for we knew that as long as our own boat was rowing about near by these fisher-folk would never bother themselves because one of our friends was perambulating up and down on Innis Coinean and frantically waving a handkerchief. The lunch-basket our prisoner had taken ashore with him was but outside show, for the snowy cloth hid nothing more enticing or sustaining than a loaf, together with three bottles of a strongly-aperient mineral water.

Towards sunset it began to blow, and dark clouds were rolling up from the west as we pulled home in the dusk, while as we drew our arm-chairs to the fire after dinner, a gale was roaring and the rain was falling in heavy splashes against our windows.

"Hurrah!" cried Murdoch; "that *is* good hearing! What a soaking that rascal will get! We are already more than half quits with him, aren't we?"

It rained and blew so hard that I could not help pitying the wretched exciseman, although the mere mention of such feelings made Murdoch furious.

The next morning, after breakfast, slinging our spy-glasses over our shoulders, we started to walk to the end of a promontory from which Innis Coinean was but a couple of miles, and from there we soon made out our victim pacing about, and at times waving a handkerchief.

"Hurrah! he's there still," said Murdoch. "He shall have another two days of it, and then, if no one has taken him off, we will send and fetch him."

To this I replied, "Look here, Murdoch, we don't want to kill the poor devil, and I think he's had quite enough of it, for, recollect, he's not a very tough customer, or one that is used to face rough weather. So I vote we walk down to the fishing cottages below to send off a boat as if by pure chance, while we go home and pack his gun and cartridges off to Laggan."

Loth, indeed, was my host to consent, but I got my way eventually, and descending the hill to a few small cottages, we arrived only to find women folk at home. On explaining our errand, two of them with much laughter volunteered to fetch off our victim; so advising them to bargain for the payment of a good ransom, we shoved their boat to sea, and they pulled to the rescue quite as strongly and as well as any two men would have done. We then retired to the hill-top, from which vantage, with only our caps above the sky-line, we eventually witnessed through our glasses the landing of our exciseman, and a more miserable-looking

creature could not be imagined. The story soon got wind, and as the exciseman's excess of zeal had made him very unpopular in the small sea town in which he was stationed, he was quickly dubbed "Laird of Innis Coinean," while incessant was the chaff directed at him about this adventure, and the "whiskey" with the other luxuries that helped him through his sojourn. At length he could stand it no longer, so making application to headquarters to be moved, our zealous friend was appointed to another district, where it is to be hoped that, profiting by our lesson, he learnt to temper zeal with discretion.

CHAPTER II.

HOW I TOOK A SHARE IN THE MONNIELACK
SHOOTINGS, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

"WANTED, a gun, to complete a party of four, on an extensive moor in the north; probable bag, six to seven hundred brace, with some roe deer, black-game, partridges, and snipe; game equally divided. Terms, £250 for the month, which will include everything.—Address, Colonel S. L., The Shooters Club, London, S.W."

Such was the advertisement that caught my eyes one day early in the month of August, 1889. Now I, Thomas Gae Green, had passed the ten previous years not wholly unprofitably in India, but the time thus spent had carried me out of touch of all my

old shooting friends, and but few of them knew I had come back "for good" to merrie England.

The "twelfth" was close at hand, so as I longed to breathe the Highland air again, and to see if I could still face the hill as of old, thus this advertisement caught me just in the frame of mind to make an experiment which I had hitherto vowed nothing should ever induce me to try. It read like a genuine affair, while the terms were certainly not exorbitant if the statements were correct, so, before an hour had passed, I was waiting in the reception-room of "The Shooters," and, very promptly, a tall, smart-looking man of about fifty, with a red face, red whiskers, red moustache with slightly waxed tips, and a pair of bright blue eyes, introduced himself to me as Colonel Softword Lovewell. His mellow voice, his soldierly bearing, with his charming manners at once prepossessed me in his favour. The name of the shooting and the rent actually paid were given me. Photographs of the house, with lists of game killed in previous seasons,

were also produced, while everything appeared satisfactory and above board.

There were two other little details I desired to know, and while hesitating how to put my questions as to whether the Colonel was a bachelor, and who the two other guns might be, he divined my thoughts and told me he was married, but that his wife was an invalid, taking no part in the management of the Monnielack establishment, as she lived almost entirely upstairs in her own suite of rooms. "So, my dear sir," said he, "you see it is practically a bachelor party, and you can smoke where you like and dress as you please. Mind, sir, I am no petticoat hater—by Jove! no—quite the reverse; but, to my mind, one lady is rather a bore, shut up with a party of four men in a shooting box."

Having expressed my entire concurrence in these sentiments, I asked, "And what about the other two guns?"

"Well," answered the Colonel, "they were both strangers until introduced to me by mutual friends.

Captain Smallgore Spiller lives in Cornwall, Mr. Auldjoe in Northumberland, and hence our arrangements have been made by letter; but they are both bachelors, while from all I can hear they are quite nice fellows."

All this sounded very pleasant, so I settled forthwith to arrive at Monnielack on the tenth of the month. A few days later I met an old friend and told him of my arrangement, when, much to my comfort, he remarked, "Oh! I know Lovewell, and you will find him quite a good sort. He was always a poor man, though, and married a widow some ten years his senior with a couple of thousand a year. She fancies herself an invalid, but I hear she is a dear old thing, for she lets Lovewell do pretty much as he pleases."

Then I came across people who knew both Spiller and Auldjoe. The report on the latter was that he was a queer old chap, with a hatred of the sound of a big big D., and a general detestation of modern methods, but withal quite a gentleman.

The report as to Spiller was not quite so satisfactory—a Militia Captain, rather bumptious, a little too fond of lifting his elbow, and a cheaply earned reputation as a sportsman, seemed to be the verdict. With this little knowledge of the party I was about to join, Monnielack Lodge duly received me on the tenth of August. My hopes were more than realized, the house was large and comfortable, the dogs looked workmanlike, the head-keeper, Donal Macdonal, was a pleasant civil-spoken man, while his daughter Bessie was just one of the very prettiest Highland lassies I ever saw, and I noticed that the Colonel was fully of the same opinion, for leaving me to talk grouse with Donal, he went off with the lassie to inspect the poultry yard.

The next day I elected to make a trouting expedition, and on returning was duly presented to Mr. Auldjoe, a tall, spare man of about sixty, with a very long clean-shaven red face covered with red pimples, while his looks and movements much

resembled those of a fishing heron, but perhaps his tight-fitting suit of black pepper-and-salt clothes, with the stiff old-fashioned white stock, contributed to this effect.

Captain Spiller was to arrive in time for dinner, but as he was late, after giving him fair law, we sat down without him, and had hardly done so before the wheels of his conveyance were heard outside, and in a few minutes the Captain entered, when with a bow to us and a shake of the Colonel's hand he rattled out a torrent of speech more rapidly and jerkily spoken than anything I had ever heard before.

"Here *we* are, Colonel," exclaimed he; "make you stare, I know, to hear me say *we*, but I've brought my wife! Only married five days, you know; couldn't leave her behind me, could I? Didn't even think of getting spliced when I settled with you; the whole thing done in a jiffey. So now I'll just run up and change, and we will be down in no time!" And before the Colonel had

recovered from the news of Mrs. Spiller, the Captain was off.

"Well, I'm damned!" said the Colonel, with a bang of his fist on the table.

"Sir!" cried Mr. Auldjoe, with a vigorous peck at his plate.

"Rather cool, at any rate," observed I.

"Pardon my expression, Mr. Auldjoe," interposed the Colonel; "and now, gentlemen, let us think what is best to be done." Then suddenly remembering Mrs. Lovewell, he exclaimed, with both hands held aloft, "Good gracious, what *will* my wife say? Excuse me, I must run upstairs and tell her."

Left alone with Auldjoe, he remarked to me, "This is a matter which is undoubtedly a breach of good faith, and one which must seriously affect the harmony of our party; but for the moment I opine our wisest course will be to make the best of it." To this pompous but feeble speech I dolefully assented.

The Colonel presently returned, saying, "Thank heavens! Mrs. Lovewell heard the news without being very much put out."

Dinner proceeded silently, slowly, and uncomfortably. Half way through the meal, the Captain appeared with his bride, and if they had been brother and sister they could not have been more alike—slight, fair, ferrety-eyed, freckled, and thirty; neither showed any sign of blushing or embarrassment, but took their seats as if they had been expected guests. She was arrayed in a flaming tea-gown, while he wore a gorgeous smoking suit. All went fairly well till coffee with cigarettes arrived, whereupon the bride rose, and saying that she did not like the smell of tobacco in any shape, asked the Colonel to show her the drawing-room.

On rejoining us the Colonel explained to Spiller that we were accustomed to smoke in the drawing-room as well as in the dining-room, to which he replied, "Oh, never mind, Colonel, we can all get on very well here"; and throwing himself into the

most comfortable arm-chair, of which there were only two, he pulled out a cigar-case covered with an enormous silver monogram, and lit up.

Somehow or other we had each taken a violent dislike to the bridegroom, so the evening hung heavy, and talk becoming constrained, on the plea of being fresh for the exertions of the morrow, Auldjoe and I beat an early retreat. Then the next day the thoughts of the sport to come induced us all to re-assemble in good humour.

Spiller appeared last at breakfast, clad in a new suit of startlingly loud, ill-fitting knickerbockers. He had brand new boots, a brand new gun, brand new cartridge bags, and while instructing his gillie to take care of a very long snow-white mackintosh that had also never seen service, he was busily engaged in pushing a hand into a most immaculate lavender kid glove. Auldjoe had appeared at the morning meal in the pepper-and-salt suit that he had arrived in, and I had been wondering how long he would take to change it, and

what would be the result, when to my astonishment he came into the hall, picked up his gun, placed a beautifully-brushed, tall black silk hat on his head, and announced that he was ready to start.

The Colonel whispered to me, "The get-up of those two fellows beats anything I've ever seen. You and I will shoot together to-day, so we will let the old crow go with the peacock and see what they can do together."

Now, Monnielack Lodge was built right on the moor, with the grouse literally at the door, and thus as the two parties divided they were quickly far apart. The Colonel's dogs did not belie their looks, while it was soon easy to see that their master was not only a very good shot, but also a very good sportsman, in whose company it was a pleasure to shoot. A most enjoyable day was passed, and we reached home with fifty-five brace. The other party we learnt had been in for some time, so that it was not until we all met at dinner that I heard their bag was but twenty-three brace.



The moment we were seated Captain Spiller opened the conversation by saying to our host, "Well, Colonel, it is quite clear you kept the best beat for yourself;" and the bride joined in with, "Oh, yes, indeed, it must have been so, for Trip"—(which we discovered was short for Triptolemus)—"is such a splendid shot that there could not have been many birds on that part of the moor over which you sent him to shoot."

As Auldjoe heard this he sat suddenly bolt upright looking just as if he was going to give the lady a peck with his long nose, but the Colonel suavely replied—

"Well, Captain, if you will come with me to-morrow we will try a fresh beat, and Donal shall settle which is the best; but I can assure you the ground you shot to-day was thought to be the likelier of the two."

We were all glad when dinner was over, and the bride relieved us of her presence. Mr. Auldjoe then began to examine Spiller with a curiously

meditative air, and, with his hands crossed on his chest, his cold grey eyes were fixed sternly on the Captain. There was a silence, as our bridegroom began to be uneasy under this piercing examination. Then Auldjoe turned to the Colonel remarking—

“I had no idea pheasants and partridges were so well grown in these parts at this time of year.”

“I am glad to hear it,” replied the Colonel, “for in five years out of six they are quite a month behind English-bred birds.”

“Indeed, that is not the case here,” joined in Spiller, “for, to tell the truth, I actually killed five pheasants and a brace of partridges to-day, thinking they were grouse”—on which Auldjoe sternly remarked—

“That, I think, was your total bag, Captain Spiller?”

“Well, yes, it was,” replied he; “but who on earth could shoot on a day like this has been? A strange gun, a keeper that didn’t know his

business, bad dogs, a blistered heel, and, I must add, Mr. Auldjoe, the sight of your tall hat, all combined to put me quite off my shooting."

Mr. Auldjoe jerked his nose towards the speaker as he replied, "The offending hat, sir, is one of Lincoln and Bennett's best, while the pattern has been in my family ever since tall hats have been worn. All my life I have never carried any other head-gear, and you, sir, are the first person I've ever met who has so rudely found fault with a trifling matter of dress, although I am well aware—and here he looked at the Colonel—that my hat is a matter which has often afforded amusement to some of the new-fangled school."

Here our host rose and said, "Well, gentlemen, we will try to make you all happier to-morrow, therefore it is settled, Captain, that you shoot with me, and I think I can promise you a good day."

On this the bridegroom sought his bride in the drawing-room.

"That's a nasty chap, Colonel," I remarked, to which my host answered—

"Yes, indeed; he will have to improve, or he will get notice to quit."

"All the better for your pheasants, Colonel," said Auldjoe.

The next day we took our sport as agreed, and I found my friend in the tall hat to be a good shot, an untiring walker, and a very pleasant companion, so we made a nice bag most happily. At dinner it was easy to see something had put the Colonel thoroughly out of temper; in vain the bride tried the blandishments of her small talk, and by degrees a feeling of depression overtook everyone except Spiller. He had replied curtly to my questions about his day's sport—

"Too tired to talk," he said.

He was, however, certainly not too tired to drink, for his attentions to the champagne decanter were frequent, and when the bride left us he turned to the butler to order him to bring another bottle, just

as if he had been in his own house, while remarking to the company in general—

“I daresay some of you will help me out, though it don’t much matter, for the walk has given me such a thirst that I feel as if I never could quench it.”

The Colonel said nothing, but told his servant to bring the wine, at which Captain Spiller went with a will.

The bottle was nearly done, when he moved somewhat unsteadily up the table, and took a seat next the Colonel, clapped him on the back, and said—

“Come on, old boy, order me another bottle; it does not cost you very dear, I’m sure; so while I finish it, you can tell us three poor devils how much profit you are making out of us.”

“Sir!” exclaimed Auldjoe; while I joined in with—

“Come, come, Captain Spiller, pray do not forget yourself; you will be sorry for your rudeness in

the morning, and, in the meantime, as you appear knocked up, don't you think bed would be the best place for you?"

He retorted, "Bed be blowed; mean to draw the old boy first; must have *some* fun for my coin, you see, and if a month of this sort of thing for two hundred and fifty pounds is not downright——

"Halloo! confound you, sir," yelled Spiller to Auldjoe, who having deliberately placed the lighted end of his cigar on the back of one of the Captain's hands, was staring sternly at the ceiling. "You lanky, tall-hatted, black-coated old idiot, I'll——" but here the Colonel jumped up, rang the bell sharply, and turned to us, saying—

"Let us leave him, gentlemen, while, as the drawing-room is occupied by Mrs. Spiller, I hope you will come with me to my own little sanctum, to smoke there."

To this our intoxicated gunner replied, "Well, I never did meet three such——;" but the butler's entrance cut short the rest of his speech, and,

turning to his servant, the Colonel said softly, "Take away the wine, then as soon as the room is cleared, tell Mrs. Spiller her husband wishes to see her!"

Arrived in our host's den, we lit cigars in silence, which the Colonel broke by saying—

"Well, I can only offer you both my apologies for Captain Spiller's behaviour, and now I'm going to send him a note, to be delivered in the morning, enclosing him a cheque for his two hundred and fifty pounds, with a request that he will quit Monnielack to-morrow; and though that will reduce our party to three, I feel sure we shall still have good sport in pleasanter company."

Having announced our approval of this plan, we talked while the Colonel wrote his letter, and that done, he joined us in better spirits, saying—

"Well, since you two have been talking over your sport, let me now tell something about mine. The Captain is absolutely the greatest duffer with a gun that I ever came across, for he is highly

dangerous to those who are out with him, and wounded my best setter badly. Black game poult, with young pheasants that could hardly fly, he never missed, while grouse that could fly, he never touched. He swore at my keeper, and told me I was not taking him to my best ground, while insinuating I was keeping back the cream of it till his month was over. Thank goodness, I managed to keep my temper, and, luckily, that extra bottle of champagne this evening will be ample excuse for kicking him out."

Next day, therefore, we sat down to dinner a very pleasant party of three.

"The fellow has had the good grace to leave me a few lines of apology," said the Colonel; and then Captain Spiller with his bride were forgotten, while all went so well that one day, when Auldjoe and I were shooting together, I said to him—

"This is really a very good place and the Colonel is a capital fellow, while there is no bother or trouble about anything, so I have made up my

mind to come again next year. Won't you come too?"

To this Auldjoe answered, "Yes, that I will with pleasure; but let us each offer the Colonel a hundred pounds a year more on the understanding that the party shall remain as it is."

"A very good idea, in which I'm quite with you," answered I.

Now, since our numbers had been reduced to three, we had taken it in turns to shoot with the Colonel, and for nearly three weeks all had gone right merrily; then one day our host announced that he would be obliged to go to Edinburgh for a couple of days on some law business; therefore Auldjoe and I were left together, and on coming home from shooting on the evening of the second day, the butler met us at the lodge gates, while with concern and grief written on his face he handed me a letter which I saw was in the Colonel's writing. The contents were as follows:—

"My dear Gae Green,—Forgive me for my deser-

tion, but pray stay on with Auldjoe and shoot away till you think the stock of game is sufficiently reduced. For myself, *I am in a mess!* Both of you, I am sure, will think me little short of a lunatic when I tell you that Bessie—my pretty Bessie!—Macdonal's daughter, has so captivated my affections that life without her is no longer worth having. My feelings are reciprocated, and we are seeking happiness together in foreign climes. Although our friendship has not been of very long standing, I feel that I may call on you to break the matter to Mrs. Lovewell. Kindly also explain all this to Auldjoe, and ask him to accept my apologies. I had most fully intended to have stayed out the time with you, but Donal began to be suspicious, and his arrangements for sending Bessie away have precipitated events."

This letter I read to my friend in the smoking-room, and though he gave signs of suppressed excitement by various violent jerks of his nose, he uttered no word till I came to the end; then

he took my hand while tragically pointing to the ceiling of Mrs. Lovewell's room, which was over the one we were in, he sternly said, "*You* must tell her, I couldn't;" and forthwith he departed to his room. I lit a cigar and sat thinking on the sofa, but always to the following effect: "Well, as Auldjoe is much my senior, surely he is a more proper person to tell poor Mrs. Lovewell than I am," then I pursued him to his bedroom only to find my friend packing a small hand-bag.

Guiltily, he said, "Look here, Green, I cannot stand these tragedies, so I'm going to walk over to the 'Inverness Arms' and stay the night there, while the rest of my belongings can follow me in the morning."

"I'm hanged if you shall," I said to myself, but to my coward I replied, "Look here, my friend, you and I have had some very pleasant days side by side, and I'm confident, from what I have seen of you that you are not the man to desert a friend in a situation like this; at any rate, dinner is ready,

so let us go and eat it with what appetite we can while we discuss the matter quietly."

To this he replied, "Very well, Green, it shall be as you wish, for perhaps it *was* rather cowardly of me to think of deserting you."

During our meal I said to the butler, in an off-hand way, and just as if the Colonel's absence was quite expected, "Oh, James, will you send up word to your mistress and tell her that as the Colonel has written to me saying he will not be back this evening, we propose to come upstairs presently for the pleasure of a talk?"

Auldjoe looked daggers at me, and as soon as the messenger had departed he said, "Surely, Green, you might have left me out of this dreadfully painful interview"; then when James returned to say Mrs. Lovewell would prefer to see us in the morning, we both were so delighted at the respite that we passed the rest of the evening quite pleasantly. As my friend's bedroom door closed I heard him mutter to himself, "Poor old Colonel! But truly

Nature has endowed Bessie with extraordinary good looks."

The next morning, in dread of what was to come, we were both ushered upstairs to Mrs. Lovewell's room. To our surprise she was dressed for travelling, and in reply to our "Good morning!" she answered, "No, gentlemen, it is '*bad* morning!' you should say; but there, pray do not look so unhappy. I have seen Donal, the stupid fellow, so already everything is known to me, and he and I are off in immediate pursuit of that silly husband of mine, who never could resist the sight of a pretty face; and it's little enough in that way I brought him, for his winning manners and handsome face won me when I was a widow old enough to have had more sense than to marry again. There was a time, though—but let that pass; so, gentlemen, pray join me in viewing the matter from my point of view, and let me see no more of such melancholy faces or doleful looks. It is poor Bessie that is most to be pitied, but I think I have arranged how best to help her."

We were so astonished and taken aback; at Mrs. Lovewell's views of the matter that all pre-arranged speeches of condolence were scattered to the winds. I think I said out loud, "Well, madam, you *are* a brick!" and then proceeded to explain that the culprits would be miles away by this time.

"Don't tell me, Mr. Green," she interposed; "they are both well known through all the country side, and could not have gone off together without raising a hue and cry. Donal found out everything the night before last, and Bessie's brother is off after her, for luckily she made a *confidante* of her cousin, who is kitchenmaid here, and the run-aways have arranged to go to Glasgow by different routes—Bessie by the long sea trip round the Mull; therefore, as her brother has started by train, he will be in good time to meet the steamer and to escort his sister to the *rendezvous* where the guilty pair are to meet this evening. By that time *I too* shall be at the trysting place, where the Colonel will meet the whole party. So now, please, excuse

me, for I am in a hurry to start. Pray order everything you want, and take my word for it the Colonel will be with you again the day after to-morrow." We wished her success, while concluding to stay on and see the end of the adventure.

Two days later a letter came from the Colonel, the contents of which were as follows—

"My dear friends, Mrs. Lovewell and I hope to be with you in time for dinner to-morrow. Will you both do me the favour of never alluding to the events of the past few days? I am cured of my folly, and regret it deeply.—Yours sincerely,
SOFTWORD LOVEWELL."

This being duly read to Auldjoe, I proposed we should forget the Colonel's escapade, and stay our time out, and thereupon he delivered himself as follows—

"Well, sir, the concatenation of circumstances has been wonderfully in the Colonel's favour, while the clever and generous behaviour of Mrs. Lovewell most fully deserves recognition; therefore, as I hardly

think any one could for a moment suppose that I could countenance immorality, and as there is a great stock of grouse left, I am prepared to agree with your proposition."

I then heard him muttering something about Bessie and Nature's endowments. That young lady having been fairly caught, was consigned to the care of some relatives at a distance, so the Colonel and his wife returned without her, and we finished our holiday with no further troubles or adventures.

Since that day Auldjoe and I have passed many happy shooting seasons together, while as each "twelfth" comes round five fast friends, of which Mrs. Lovewell is by no means the least, meet under the roof of Monnielack Lodge; the Colonel, Auldjoe, myself, and Donal make up the quintette.

Bessie has married and gone to the Colonies; but since that day all the female servants at Monnielack have been remarkable alike for their age and ugliness.

CHAPTER III.

TWO MONTHS AT SPEYSIDE.

SOME few years ago a bright April morning saw two friends detrain at a small station on the Speyside railway.

Two sturdy gillies with a barrow apiece were in waiting on the platform, to wheel the baggage of the new arrivals piece by piece to a pretty cottage hard by. As the men handled the portmanteaus, it was easy to see some were marked in big red letters C. O., while others were distinguished by R. P. in equally large white characters. It will be as well at once to state these letters stood respectively for Charles Onions and Richard Pork, and by the latter this history is related. Charles

Onions (known to his intimates as "Violets") had rented some three miles of the Spey for a couple of months, and had bidden me, his old friend Richard Pork, to come and help him coax the salmon from the rocky pools of that magnificent river.

The cottage in which we were to take up our abode was kept scrupulously clean and well ordered by two sisters. Tall, thin, aged, dour and virgin Scotch "bodies" were the Miss Monyplies. One was the cook, the other "the waitress," while they were mutually assisted by a short, fat, dirty, red-haired, unkempt, but ever-smiling lassie.

The dress and manners, however, of the two Miss Monyplies offered such a guarantee that all about them must needs be respectable that we paid small heed to this young person's peculiarities of raiment or appearance, while later on she herself by the acuteness of her reasoning so thoroughly converted Onions to the belief that the whole of her untidy and dirty appearance arose from the deep conviction

of long experience, that he ever regretted allowing sentiments partaking of not perfectly respectful admiration to enter his head with regard to our Maggie, for said he to her one day—"Why on earth don't you brush and comb your hair, lassie? Now see here, if you'll promise me to do it every morning, I will make you a present of a comb and a pair of brushes."

"Thank you kindly, sir," replied Maggie; "I hear tell that the gran' leddies brush their hair each day; but for my pairt once a week's enough for me, and e'en then it's like tearing the verra life out o' me."

In vain Onions tried to explain that the daily process would be preferable and less painful than the weekly one, but as Maggie would have none of it, we both came to the conclusion that she had reasons equally good to excuse her dirty hands, ill-gartered stockings, and slip-shod shoes, and so we left her undisturbed; thankful moreover should we have been if she had but returned the compliment as far as our cakes and fruit were concerned, for

surely never yet did any one lassie devour so much sweet stuff—sugar, prunes, figs, candied ginger, cake, and shortbread vanished before her in a manner that was marvellous. At last we were driven to keeping our sweeties under lock and key; but the very first day we tried it Charlie, *after helping himself*, went off to the river before me with the key in his pocket, so that I not only had no sweeties, but worse still no whiskey, for this one cupboard held all our stores, and determined a similar mishap should not occur again, Charlie gave up all idea of locking things up, and simply wrote to Lumsden and Gibson to send out treble quantities of saccharine luxuries from Aberdeen, and thus Maggie continued to have her fill.

Now, lest some of my readers may be tempted on account of our weakness for sweets to look upon us as a couple of youngsters fresh from school, it must be stated we were both on the wrong side of thirty; also it must be confessed that Onions had rather a sweet

tooth, for his great receipt for warming up his toes and generally restoring circulation of the blood after a long deep wade in snow water, was several lumps of candied ginger with some Glenlivet on the top of them, and I can only assure my readers that there are worse ways of getting warm.

This day of our advent we did not think it worth while to take our rods out, so after unpacking portmanteaus we contented ourselves with an afternoon's walk along the bank of our fishery. Splendid-looking water we found it, so in the evening we divided it into two beats, and, tossing for choice, to my lot it fell to make a start on the upper one. We were astir betimes on the following morning, and though Onions was first in the bathroom, I soon heard his welcome cry of "Coast clear," and the sound of his return to his quarters. Now the bathroom door was exactly opposite my bedroom, while it was but a few strides from one to the other; also the whole of the rooms on that

floor were our very own; thus, as I was in a hurry to get dressed, and vexed at the start Onions already had of me, like a reckless man I discarded all ceremony, dashed off my night-shirt, flung a bath towel round me, and in two strides I was in the bathroom, with the door already locked, when, lo and behold, to my horror I found the eldest Miss Monyplies behind it! She, poor thing, thinking that both her lodgers had tubbed, had gone into the room to get some china from a cupboard, and when first discovered by me she was standing in dismay on a chair, each hand holding out in mute expostulation a pile of cups and saucers.

“Goodness gracious!” said I.

“Open the door, young man, and let me out,” cried Miss Monyplies.

Now that is precisely what I was trying to do, but the shock to my modesty had been so great that all efforts to unlock the door were unavailing. “Confound the lock!” I cried, and then venturing to look at Miss Monyplies, I saw she was still on the chair

with her face to the wall, while on hearing my remark she said severely, "The lock will just be turning the wrong way, Mr. Por-r-r-k." I then got the door open and fled to my room, from whence I did not again venture till Miss Monyplies had had ample time to make good her retreat.

Now although this *contretemps* with the eldest Miss Monyplies caused Onions much amusement, it must be stated that it led to a mutual shyness between the parties concerned which did not pass away for some days, and this feeling of bashfulness on the part of Miss Monyplies was only at last dispelled by the carelessness of myself in one day leaving my glass eye lying alongside my false teeth on the washing-stand. Miss Monyplies discovered these necessities, and having placed them on a black Japan tray, entered the breakfast-room just as we were about to begin our meal, and without a word handed the same to me. But as long as I was clothed I was not going to be abashed, so I took my property and said, "Thank you, ever so

much; I was just going to run upstairs to fetch them. You see, an *ass* shot my eye out at a grouse drive, while a horse knocked my teeth out in a hunting smash. Real bad luck, eh, Miss Monyplies? for I'm barely thirty, and sound as a bell in all other respects, I can assure you."

Miss Monyplies said, "Indeed, sir, I'm nae doubting it," and fled; but from that day she took quite a motherly interest in me and her shyness vanished.

To return to the fishing, however. On the morning after our arrival we were quickly under way, and parted from each other full of great expectations. Now both of us were fairly good men with the rod, for what we lacked in skill we made up for by hard work combined with perseverance. Three days passed, and not so much as a "rise" had rewarded our united efforts, so that long faces returned each evening to partake of Miss Monyplies' "collops," the while we heaped anathemas on the head of the London agent who had let Onions the fishing, and gaily

assured him we should easily average a fish a day each. At last, as the fifth blank day was drawing to the usual dismal end, I hooked and lost a salmon in the dusk, and, disgusted beyond measure at my bad luck, I started off home at a great pace. In a bend of the road overhung with trees I came up with Onions with his old gillie, Sandy Gralloch, who it was quite easy to see was staggering along under a heavy burden. As Charlie became aware of my approach he welcomed me with a shout of joy, and turning back, he cried out, "Broken the spell at last, my boy. There are three beauties in the bag—twenty, seventeen, and eleven! I hope you've got something, too?"

"What extraordinary luck!" I muttered to myself, and joining Onions, I told him of my misfortune.

By this time we were clear of the trees, and I felt the consolation of tobacco was a necessity, so I said—

"Well, Charlie, you lucky fellow, stop a minute, and, while I fill my pipe, let us have a look at your fish."

So a halt was called, while nothing loth to be quit of his load, old Sandy deposited it at my feet, and whilst I, full of envy, bent low over the basket, Onions looked proudly down on me to remark—

“There, now!—beauties indeed, aren’t they? Just take care you do as well to-morrow, for we have plenty of lost time to make up.”

As I opened the basket the white sides of the fish gleamed so brightly in the twilight, that for some seconds I enviously feasted my eyes, then a something made me shift my hand from the basket to the tail of the biggest fish. I turned it up, dropped it, only to treat the other two in the same way; then I pulled their gills open, and prodded their sides with my finger, the while a wicked grin stole over my face as I stood up to exclaim—

“Charlie, you old goose, they are just three kelts; let’s bury ’em, or we shall be fined.”

“Rubbish!” retorted Onions; “just like your

nasty jealousy!" and then all four of us crowded round the basket, while the three fish were stretched out on the grass, and now that they had been some time out of water my verdict was quickly confirmed, and for the rest of the homeward journey Onions was so vexed he would hardly speak to me. The gillies got the fish, while Charlie was duly credited in the columns of the *Scotsman* and the *Field* as the slayer of three heavy clean salmon.

The next morning we started once more for the disappointing river, and side by side we strolled up stream. It was my day on the upper water, so when reaching the head of Charlie's beat I said I would wait to watch him fish his top pool. Old Sandy quickly had his master's rod ready, when there came an exclamation of despair from his lips, and approaching Onions, he said, "Indeed, sir, but I've no brought the tackle-bag or your waders." But Charlie only laughed, while as he sent his man off for the forgotten necessities, he turned to say

to me, "What a rage I should have been in if that had happened when there were plenty of fish about; as it is, it is quite a relief not to have to keep on flogging the water for nothing, for it is the most hopeless river I ever saw; so now then, Dick, jump into your waders, and set to work while I watch you fish the pool." In return I offered my rig-out to Charlie, but he would have none of it, so I was soon in the water, and had not made a dozen casts before I was fast in a fish. "Another of your kelts," I called out, but no! this time a real splendid ten pound bar of silver flashed high out of the water, and was soon safely on the bank. I cried to Charlie, "This won't do; I'm poaching your preserves. Now do take my waders to finish out the pool, then by the time you've done old Sandy will be back," for the cast was a lengthy one. But not a bit of it; Charlie haughtily bade me go on, and before Sandy returned three other spring salmon were laid on the bank.

Then the missing gear arrived, while as Sandy learnt the facts there were almost tears in his eyes. We then separated, and I hastened to try the upper water in greedy hopes of more sport, while Charlie strode off down stream with every muscle of his back set rigid in disgust. For the rest of that day both of us "wrought sair hard," but not another rise did we get, and Sandy told me in the evening, with a twinkle in his eye, he had had a "terrible time with Muster Onions."

The weather now turned bitterly cold; snow and hail fell during the day, sharp frosts ruled the night, and we fished for a whole week without getting anything except a few kelts. So severe was the cold that one day when on my way to the top of the water I came across a curlew and an oyster-catcher, both so frozen that they could but flutter along the ground in front of us. The two birds were crouched within twenty yards of each other, under a sand-bank by the water's edge. Having caught them, I sat down and placed them

under my waistcoat, one on each side of me, and there they quietly remained to enjoy the warmth, only showing any sign of fear by the throbbing of their bright eyes. I then soaked some bread-crumbs in whiskey, and down the throat of each bird I poked some of this mixture.

The warmth of my body coupled with the strength of the strange dose soon told a tale, and in the course of a quarter of an hour each bird was enabled to fly strongly away. During all this process, curious to relate, neither of these very wild shy birds struggled to escape, while as a fact in natural history it can be stated that the curlew was much more averse to whiskey than the oyster-catcher.

We had also a further instance of how severe the night frosts were, for when the next Sabbath came round we passed a good part of that day in hunting for plovers' eggs, and on this frosty Sunday we had picked up some five dozen, which we carefully boiled for ourselves; but, alas, at Monday

morning's breakfast they all went "pop," and splashed over our fingers as soon as the shell was broken, so we quickly realised our delicacies were frost-bitten and useless, for no matter how fresh-laid or how long it be boiled, a frosted egg will never set.

We were preparing to start for the river when a small boy came up to the front door to enquire if we would buy six dozen plovers' eggs for five shillings. Questioned as to where he got them, we learned that his eggs had also been taken on the Sabbath, but, whereas ours had been collected from high-lying fields, his, he said, were all quite good, having, he explained, been taken some distance away off lower-lying lands—"Joost aroun' Craigellachie, sirs." Well, we thought it odd that he should have found all good eggs, while ours were all bad ones, so on expressing some doubt on the subject, at the lad's desire we sent for a pail of water to test them, and one and all promptly sank to the bottom, which neither a frosted or addled egg will do.

So we rejoiced in our bargain, and while Onions took the eggs carefully out of the pail, dried them in a table napkin, and placed them on the hall table, I went upstairs to get the five shillings, for that was a larger sum than either of us ever carried when fishing, and as the key of my travelling bag, in which all cash was stowed away, had been mislaid, I was comparatively a long time gone. However, the missing article was found at last, so, hurrying downstairs money in hand, payment was about to be made. As I passed the hall table, on which the eggs were neatly laid in rows, a single drop of water was standing out from near the small end of almost every one of them. Out of curiosity I picked up an egg and wiped off the globule, when, to my astonishment, it at once began to reappear. Then in a second I saw there was a pin-hole in one of the black spots of the egg-shell, while a look at the boy convinced me that all was not right, for as he met my eye he turned and fled as fast as his legs would carry

him ; but he escaped not entirely scatheless, for I pursued, and deftly lodged the frosted egg I had in my hand plump in his ear.

The young rascal, having discovered that his eggs were spoilt, had made pin-holes in each and filled them up with water, so that they should sink when tested, and thus he had hoped to outwit two simple-minded Saxons. However, as his trick had been detected, we only had a good laugh over it.

Sport still continued dreadfully poor, and our chief excitement was in occasionally breaking a rod joint while perfecting ourselves in the Spey cast ; needless to say, we went through much unnecessary exertion in this performance, which culminated on my part by my driving a big salmon hook well over the barb into that soft fleshy outside part of the right hand which is situated about a couple of inches below the knuckle of the little finger. Cutting it out was a surgical operation not performed as neatly as could be desired. However, I had but the left hand to work with, while the

knife blade was none of the sharpest ; also it must be borne in mind that it makes a difference in the skill of the operator if he is cutting up himself instead of someone else. I have the hook to this day—likewise the scar.

As sport continued so very poor, I asked my host if I might telegraph to Bristol for a can of minnows, and though he ridiculed the idea that they would prove a better lure than the fly, he readily consented, merely bargaining that he was not to be asked to use the "beastly things." Three more days passed by, and each of them had been absolutely devoid of sport, when the minnows arrived all alive and kicking. The very next day I used the new bait and captured three clean fish, with a lot of kelts ; while in the succeeding two days I added nine other good salmon to my score. Now during the same period Charlie, who had held on strictly to the fly, had captured but two, and converted by this striking disparity he forthwith became a minnow fisher himself. As he learnt

the art quickly, from that time forth we both did nearly equally well, and far better than any other anglers either up or down the river.

This, I believe, was the very first time the natural minnow was used on the Spey, but even with this lure our sport remained of the poorest, while since those days, sad to relate, each succeeding year has seen a further deterioration, until this spring of 1894 has been the very worst ever known on Speyside, for many anglers have not taken more than two or three fish in a month! and one good man actually records it in print that he has had 25,000 casts for one fish!

Of course we were abused for employing this lure, and called poachers, etc., by other anglers who persisted in using the fly only; but as we had already given every possible chance to every sort of fly that Shanks and old Cruikshank could produce, and all without success, we were glad to get a few fish the best way we could.

The wading of the Spey is often very bad, and

each of us anxiously looked forward to seeing the other take a header. This, however, did not happen, but we witnessed a gentleman fishing opposite us take three very neat dives in rapid succession. We had always kept an eye on him, for our gillies had told us "he was no verra sure of himself in the watter," and they were correct, for one day we saw him stumble and take a regular souser; up he came, minus his rod, but only to disappear again headlong with a mighty splash. Up again, but down once more, till matters began to look serious, until, as he re-appeared above water, his gillie ran in and caught hold of him. "All's well that ends well," said I, as we watched the unfortunate one come dripping out of the river; to which Onions gently replied, "I never saw anything so funny. How I wish he'd do it again!" No chance of this, however, for from that moment our opposite neighbour swore off wading the Spey.

For some days there had been a wicked

feeling of deplorable jealousy rankling in my heart against my host, which had come about in this way. We had had a bet of five shillings as to who took the biggest fish, and Charlie had lately landed a noble one of twenty-five pounds, which fact he good-naturedly mentioned many times a day, as, indeed, well he might, for large spring fish are rare on the Spey, although in the autumn plenty of heavier ones are got. Well, our time was nearly up, and as we ferried across the river on the last day but one the ferryman said to me, "Indeed, but she's in fine ply the day, sir;" and right enough the man was, for a big, rolling, peat-stained water was running under the boat, but yet quite clear enough for fishing.

As I jumped ashore, Boatie called after me, "Good sport, sir, and I'm thinking you will get it if you're deeligent." His prophecy, however, appeared likely to be wrong, for up to three o'clock I had not seen even a fish splash. I was wading deep in the water while nearing the tail of a favourite cast when my line tightened very slowly to a

long dead pull. Raising the rod smartly, for a second it was uncertain if I had hooked a rock or a sunken bough, for there had been no sign of a "boil." All doubts, however, were instantly dispelled by a sharp tug, and then screech went the reel, great waves in circles spread around, while a huge tail lashed the water white. Three times then did my captive dash best pace in a great oval round the end of the pool, the meanwhile keeping close to the surface, and sending forth waves on either side like a small steam launch; then steadily he began to bore up stream, and having found a place to suit him, he commenced a sulk.

I seized this opportunity to get into shallow water, and as I neared the bank my gillie broke the silence by saying, "Yon's a verra heavy fish, sir, but I fear me he's too big to be anything but a kelt." To this I vouchsafed no reply, but got well below my captive and put on considerable pressure, which quickly converted his masterly inactivity into a most lively opposition, for the reel

shrieked and the rod trembled as he dashed into the stream once more to fight it out. After a few very lively minutes he paused again, so as there was a good shelving gravel shore behind me, I came out of the water with the intention of coaxing him into this bay. Stepping back from the bank, the manœuvre seemed about to be crowned with success, for he allowed himself to be towed right on to the sand.

"Hurrah, he is clean and a whopper!" I cried, when with a guttural yell my gillie, who had lost his head at the sight of such a big fish, rushed forward, gaff in hand. As the monster perceived the approaching foe he appeared for the first time to realise his danger, so with a desperate splash and one rattling run he placed some seventy yards of water between us. I looked reproachfully at my man, who was trembling with excitement, as he said to me, "Fifty puns at the verra least." I replied, "All the better, Donald, but keep behind with the gaff and pass it me if I ask for it, for if

we do get him, I mean to pull him out for myself."

After a short rest on the far side of the river he began quickly to head down stream. It would have been fatal to check him, so we followed at best pace, while with a rattle he dashed into the pool below. At this moment of the fight my heart was in my mouth, for the bank receded from the river in a large, irregular half-circle, so while my fish had to go about seventy yards in a straight line, I had to race along the bank more than double that distance, for the fish was on the shallow side of the rapid, and the water ran darkly deep next the bank I stood on. Down he went without a halt, and run as fast as I could, by the time I had negotiated the half-circle the rod was straight, while so many yards of line were hanging listlessly in the water, that it looked a hundred to one he was off. Winding up at all speed, as the line became tight I once more with great joy saw the rod assume that curve so dear to

the angler, and a shriek from the reel cried "All's well." But down stream he continued to go—fully seventy yards between us, he on one side, I on the other.

At length we came to a "croy," or "put" as they call it on the Tweed, and then right from the other side of the stream I coaxed him into the backwater of the croy, but only to see him once more dash back to resume his old position. We passed other "croys," and at each of them I repeated my persuasive process, while at each of them he renewed his counter-attack, and still down stream we went. Then we neared the last "croy," so as there was no other good landing-place for a long distance below this, I determined to make one more prolonged and vigorous effort to finish the fight. With gallant stubbornness he battled it out; I persuaded him ten yards nearer to me, and with a stroke of his tail he retreated fifteen. For fully twenty minutes this went on, but his rushes grew weaker, his white sides showed oftener, while each

wave of the great tail propelled him a less distance, till quite suddenly he was so dead beat, as to come floating and rolling on to the gravel, too tired for words to express. Donald handed me the gaff, and in a second my prize was ashore, while the thwack of "the priest" as it descended on his head proclaimed the end of the fight. Forty pounds exactly! and a forty-five minutes' hard struggle over a mile of heavy water. I cried "Bravo!" for well I might, as but very few fishers in British waters ever have the luck to kill a forty pound fish, and then I remembered Charlie's "sprat" of twenty-five pounds, while I thought to myself how mercilessly I would take my revenge.

The next day we packed up our traps, and took a warm but solemnly decorous farewell of the Misses Monyplies, while in spite of bad sport, we were loth to turn our backs on Strathspey, for though we had taken but forty-two clean fish, and landed some hundred and twenty kelts in the nine weeks, we had yet had plenty of hard, exciting exercise



in fine scenery, combined also with much "laffter and chaffter." At least I, Dick Pork, can solemnly swear I had had a very happy time, while Charlie's verdict was, "Well, it has been good fun in spite of bad sport, and there are worse ways of spending spare cash ; but confound that London shooting agent and his knavish tricks!" Then as he lit a pipe I heard him mutter to himself, "What a lucky beggar Dick was to get that forty-pounder!"

CHAPTER IV.

A MONTH AT STRATHMAACOE.

VERILY I do not think that in all the kingdom there was a happier man than myself, as I, Augustus Gee, drove up to the hall door of Castle Strathmaacoe on a sunny afternoon on the 11th of August, 1881. The original and historical castle was of the tower and extinguisher order, while of the little that remained thereof the basement contained servants' offices, and the upper part held nothing but a few bachelors' bedrooms. The whole of the rest of the building was comparatively modern, and had been added on to the older structure with profuse luxury. It was not much, however, that I cared for the style of the architecture of the house about to shelter me; that which interested me beyond everything else

was the fact of there being some thirty thousand acres of deer forest, with nearly as many more of grouse and low ground shooting, surrounding and belonging to this Castle of Strathmaacoe. The fortunate Highland laird who owned it had also another property somewhat of the same character in an adjacent county; thus as circumstances prevented him from living in both, and doing justice to each, he had wisely allowed my friend, Tom Berks, to take a lease of Strathmaacoe at the bagatelle of three thousand pounds a year. There were people who knew nothing about sport who said it was very dear; others there were, myself included, who vowed it was "dirt cheap, sir!" but whether dear or the reverse, Tom Berks cared not a jot; the house together with the sport were both first-rate, while the happy lessee could well afford not to bother himself with questions of economy; he had got what he wanted, and took care that all else should be in keeping with the luxurious surroundings.

In this sportsman's paradise then I had been invited to stay for a month, and on my arrival the house was already full of guests, amongst whom were several ladies; for there was a Mrs. Berks, and a better hostess it would have been hard to find; also there were some men who did not shoot, while lastly there were the four who did, and who with Berks and myself made up the party of six "guns." During dinner I learnt I was a favoured guest, as the other quartette had only been asked to stay till the 25th of the month. However, Tom Berks and I were not only old schoolfellows but fast friends, and he found good-natured pleasure in ministering to my hobbies, for so great was my devotion to the gun, and so well-known to him, that he laughingly used to assert, I should come to my own funeral with a breechloader in one hand and a rod in the other.

Now, to chronicle the doings of a whole month by such expressions as "on the first day of my visit," "the next day," "the day after this," "the

fourth day of my stay," etc., etc., would only at last involve me in a hank: I have thought to escape from the difficulty and to make matters clearer by recording the events of the period in diary form. There is no need to mention the names of all the guests, but suffice it to say that amongst them there was a very pretty Miss Kent, a General Sussex, and a Mr. Thomas Surrey. Commencing then with the 12th of August, and, dear reader, do not be alarmed, for I am not about to rhapsodise on the beauties of porridge, mountain air, mountain dew, purple heather, distant hills, feathering sterns, deadly tubes, crowing cocks, long shots, and lunches by babbling burns. Oh, no, my "twelfth" will be done with in a very few words, for here is all my diary records:—

1881, Wednesday, 12th of August.—Lovely day, started off with Tom about 10.30, rather late, but he had to see to the getting away of the other two sets of guns, for during the first fortnight he sends out daily three parties of two guns each. We drew lots for our beats over night, and take it in turn

to shoot with our host, while every day there is a small bet of "five bob a nob" as to which couple should make the best bag.

The dogs were A 1, and we found a great stock of birds, and although they were rather wild, we brought home 79 brace and some "various." Total for the three parties, 203½ brace; so sport was pretty equally divided—but Tom and I collared the dollars!

August 13th, 14th, 15th, very fine each day; dollars not all going into one pocket. Surrey is a real good fellow and a fine shot. Up to this evening 775 brace of grouse have been put into the larder.

16th, Sunday.—Breakfasted at ten o'clock; pretty Miss Kent did not put in an appearance, and later on in the smoking-room we heard from Tom that she was indisposed and much upset by having seen a ghost during the night. On this announcement Tom was overwhelmed with questions from all sides. What ghost? Whose ghost? Which room

was it in? were all asked him by different voices at the same moment. When silence came at last, Tom Berks, with rather a grave face, begged us not to chaff or question Miss Kent about her adventure.

"You see," said he, "she is so much upset that she wishes to leave the house, but we have changed her room and persuaded her to stay on. Her story is that she woke in the night to see the figure of a woman standing at the foot of her bed, and from its appearance she was at once certain it could be nothing earthly, so thereupon she was terrified into a faint and did not recover her senses till it was daylight. I must confess it is a very odd thing she should fancy she has seen this apparition, for strange to say I heard from one of the keeper's wives, when I took this place two years ago, that there was reported to be a walking lady belonging to the castle, who only appeared every three years, and thus it would seem as if Miss Kent had been gossiping with some of the old cronies about the

place, and her imagination has doubtlessly done the rest. At any rate, my friends, the ghost won't spoil our sport, and we will leave it Miss Kent's empty room to wander in. Furthermore," continued Tom, "I'm sure it will be better not to talk of the matter; my wife is the only other lady in the house who knows of it, and if we keep it quiet, the rest of them and the children will not be made nervous."

With this we all readily agreed, and then separating into twos and threes, the day was passed as Highland Sundays usually are by the heathen Saxon. Some took their "glasses" up the opposite hill for a spy into the forest, others wrote letters, and another couple went off to the railway station three miles distant to watch the mails from south and north arrive and depart, while three more made their way to the river on a pearl-hunting expedition. With regard to this latter pursuit, it is a snare and a delusion, for I have fished up and cracked open thousands of mussels, but never yet

has there been any pearl in them other than in the similitude of an unpolished dust shot.

17th and 18th.—Torrents of rain fell on these two days, and it was impossible to do anything more than potter about the "policies" in macintoshes.

19th.—Tom had business to attend to, so only two parties went grouseing, and I was asked to supply the castle with venison. The rain had gone, while the day was all that could have been desired, when after a long jolt on pony back over a rough country I found myself in the forest; then followed a lot of hard walking, with a great deal of spying. The first thing discovered was an eagle sitting on a rock devouring a grouse, and with deep interest we observed the proceedings of the splendid bird. While watching him a fox, hunting a hare by scent just like a dog, ran into the focus of the glass, but his nose did not seem very good, and pussy easily won the day.

Then we found a nice stag with horns nearly clear of velvet feeding quite alone. He was some

two miles off, but an easy stalk, and in half-an-hour we were crouched in a very wet dirty peat bog a hundred and twenty yards from him. Our quarry was resting near the top of the hill a little below our position, with his back to us. Apparently he was lost in admiration of the view, for beyond an occasional slight shake of the head, or a flick of the ear, he seemed carved in stone.

I was but a young hand at deer in those days, so whispered to Donald, "How long is this going to last?" and received for reply, "I'm no verra sure, Sir, but anyway we will wait till he rises."

This, however, I did not feel at all inclined to do; thus when a very long hour had already lapsed, I proposed a sitting shot, but was persuaded to "bide yet a wee;" so I looked at my watch and made a mental vow that if needs must I would be patient for another sixty minutes. Now two hours slip away in no time by the fire-side with a pretty girl to chat with, or a nice book to read; or equally at the dinner table, or in the smoking-room, they



vanish imperceptibly; but two hours spent cramped up in a horrid black peat bog, afraid to move, speak, or smoke, and with nothing to do but keep a continual watch on a pair of horns standing out of the heather is quite another way of passing time, and was monotonous in the extreme.

At length the second hour went, and the beast was still like the stag on my host's crest—couchant. I therefore began to prepare to shoot. The rest for the rifle was good, the mark absolutely still, and I thought it nearly impossible to miss. But Donald was of a different opinion, and whispered to me—

“If ye'll no wait further, Sir, and indeed I never saw a beast lie so long as yon, let me whistle him up for you; he will stand still for a bittie as he gets to his legs, and you can tak him then.”

To this I consented, so having settled myself in position, with the full-cocked rifle at my shoulder, I made the signal for Donald to whistle. But as the stag took no notice of the first sound it was followed up with a louder one, which was still

unheeded ; then there came a yet shriller whistle, with no better result, and next I tried my hand by performing a loud cough, but that too had no effect, and Donald said, "The wind is joost taking the sound awa', Sir."

Now, during each of these experiments, I had been ready to shoot, and the four disappointments had made me callous ; so I said to my man, nearly out loud, "Try a real good one," and taking me too much at my word, his fingers were crammed into his mouth, his cheeks expanded, while there rang out a shriek any steam engine might have been proud of. Instantly the stag was up and away, the promised halt does not take place, and before I could press the trigger he had vanished. Donald looked utterly miserable, but I cheered him up by suggesting a peep over the face down which our stag had disappeared, so going cautiously forward we soon saw our hard-of-hearing friend trotting off in the distance.

On advancing further we spied three stags feed-

ing below us to the left, and barely a mile away. The stalk was easy, so was the shot, and Donald was quickly smiling pleasantly as he performed the gralloch, but from that time forth I have ever been content to leave alone the system of "whustling him up."

We then started for home, Donald leading the way, and in making a turn round a high rocky cliff he suddenly halted, drew back to me, pulled the rifle from the cover, put the weapon in my hands, and waved me forward. Delighted at the prospect of getting another stag, my joy was turned to disappointment, as nothing could be seen but a fox prowling some hundred yards off, and even though it be in Scotland, and many many miles from any hunting country, I yet fight shy of pulling trigger on one, while on this occasion there was the greater reason for refraining, as there were two masters of hounds amongst our party; for my host and one of his guests each hunted a celebrated pack.

“Shoot, sir, shoot!” whispered Donald; so to please him I brought the rifle to my shoulder and pulled the trigger as if I had been taking a shot at a grouse with a gun, and to my astonishment poor fox dropped stone dead. A fine big dog he was, and Donald pocketed the brush to nail to his vermin board, while on arriving home the death of reynard was discreetly omitted from the list of the day’s adventures. The grousing parties had 93 brace between them.

20th.—This morning we all went together to make an attack on the ptarmigan of the heights above the castle. As we started Surrey came up and patted me on the back, while whispering in my ear—

“I say, Gee, shall you and I give the others a lead up the hill, for if we set them a good pace, the whole party will be more quickly at the top?”

I consented, and off we strode. Presently I heard suppressed laughter behind me, and on looking back beheld a grin on every following face. I wondered

what the joke was, and on again glancing to the rear found the same grinning faces, while all eyes were fixed on my back. Instinctively I swung my hand behind me, and as I did so, Surrey with a big guffaw bounded out of harm's way, for it clutched the brush of my victim of yesterday. That inveterate joker had been to Donald's cottage before breakfast, had seen the brush, wormed out the story, and having possessed himself of the trophy, had meanly hooked it on to my coat with a previously attached bent pin when he patted me on the back in so friendly a manner. And thus adorned, he had persuaded me to march some distance in front of two masters of hounds, who were exploding with laughter.

Mem.—I am going to be even with Surrey! Our bag consisted of 48 ptarmigan, 45 hares, and 19 grouse.

21st and 22nd.—These were two fine days, and we kept pegging away at the grouse, until by Saturday evening we had made up the total since

the 12th, to 1103 brace, a good nine days' work. Nothing more had been seen or heard of Mrs. Ghost.

23rd.—Was the usual sort of Sunday.

24th.—I was up early this morning finishing off some letters in the smoking-room, while waiting for the breakfast gong to sound, when General Sussex entered hastily exclaiming—

“Good morning, Gee. I'm off to-day, though my time is not up till the day after to-morrow—the fact is I've seen that horrible ghost, and nothing could induce me to spend another night here.”

“Oh, come, General,” I answered; “surely it must be a freak of your imagination, or, perhaps—remembering the fox's brush—it is some trick of Surrey's.”

“Not a bit of it, I assure you,” he replied. “Ugh! the loathsome, creepy thing almost touched me;” and with this he bolted from the room.

Now, the General and Surrey each slept in one of the bachelor rooms in the old tower, so I dashed

off to the apartment of the latter full of curiosity, and flinging open his door plunged at once into my subject by saying, "What on earth is all this cock-and-bull story of the General's about a ghost; did you see it, too?"

"Yes, I did," he replied, "and I'm fairly puzzled; but sit down while I tell you all about it. Well, now you will remember how early we all went to bed last night, and I'm sure you'll bear me out that every one of the party was literally as sober as a judge. The General and I came upstairs together, and, having wished him good night, I locked myself into my room, as is my invariable custom, and was soon fast asleep. How long I remained so I am not aware, but as far as I know I awoke of my own accord, and on opening my eyes, lo and behold! there, standing at the foot of my bed, was a woman, whom I at once recognised from the description as the very same that had disturbed Miss Kent so much. I admit I felt somewhat creepy, while a cold shiver ran down my

back, but I was not long in making up my mind to 'go for' my visitor, so I jumped out of bed with the determination of laying violent hands on the intruder.

"As I approached the figure backed, with a quick but steady movement, to that door there which separates the General's room from mine. On my side you see there is a chest of drawers, while on his there stands a dressing-table, and as the figure, or whatever it was, reached the door it vanished, and I was in the dark. Well! I struck a match, ascertained that the entrance to my room was still locked, and then began to think. The process soon persuaded me to say to myself, 'This must be what is called a night-mare, or perhaps I have been dreaming and walking in my sleep—three hearty meals with no exercise to speak of yesterday might account for it,' and so I tumbled into bed again, while the more the matter was thought over the more convinced I became this was the true explanation, so therefore I fell asleep,

resolved to say nothing about the matter to anybody.

“My servant called me as usual, and equally as usual I had to get out of bed to unfasten the door to let him in. When I was nearly dressed I cried out to Sussex, who could be heard at his ablutions, ‘How are you, General, this morning; a lovely day for our work, is it not?’ To this he replied, ‘Oh, don’t ask me how I am! I’m all to pieces, for I’ve seen the ghost.’ ‘Really, and what was it like?’ I called back; and then, Gee, I can assure you he described to me exactly the very same figure that I had chased out of my room apparently into his!

“‘What did it do, General?’ I then asked; and he answered, ‘Oh, the loathsome thing came round the bed till it got to my side, when, begad! it began to bend over me, so, my dear fellow, you may laugh at me if you like, but I popped my head under the bed-clothes, and there I waited the issue of events till the sun shone. Devil another night will I spend in this house, I can assure you.’”

“Well, that beats everything,” I remarked; “for it really must be a genuine ghost, Surrey, as in this old tower you are so isolated and so high above ground that no trickery could possibly be practised. Confound the restless old lady; she will clear the house if she goes on like this.”

“Bother her,” answered my friend; “but ghost or no ghost I’m precious hungry after all this palaver, so as it is my day in the forest come along and have breakfast.”

It was an extra early meal, and none of the ladies were present, and thus once more we were sworn to secrecy concerning our spectre visitor, while as all Tom’s eloquence failed to persuade the General to stay, he was forthwith made to promise he would declare his sudden departure was caused solely by a wire bringing him news of events requiring his immediate presence elsewhere. Having settled this we wished him a hearty good-bye, and went off to our sport.

Tom and I were shooting together this day,

while Surrey was to be in the forest with Donald ; thus, on our way to our beat, we naturally discussed this latest and somewhat startling phase of our ghostly visitant, so as we passed a cottage the idea struck Tom of asking the occupant—a very old woman—if she could tell us anything about this walking lady.

In response to our tap at the door we were at once invited inside, and as soon as Tom had made his greetings by offering the old lady a taste of whiskey, he lost no time in explaining the object of our visit. The old woman listened in silence till he had done, and then, with a laugh, she said—

“I’ve been thinking this while that some o’ ye wad be seeing her soon ; for this is the verra year she is due. Every third year she is as sure to come as the heather is to bloom. ‘Twice she shows, and awa’ she goes’ ; so you have finished wi’ her the noo, sir.”

Tom looked quite relieved at hearing this good news, and in reply to his enquiry as to what was

the story connected with the triennial appearance of the apparition, our hostess said—

“Weel, sir, they tell that mony years back the lady was the wife of a laird of Strathmaacoe—a bad mon, who, for wicked reasons of his ain, was wanting to be rid of her. So he ca’ed her upstairs into the verra room where your friend speered the ghaist, and where her sick bairn was lying sair ill on the bed. Then, as the puir mither stooped over the bairn to kiss it, the rascally laird plunged his dirk right through her. Hech, sirs, that’s the story, and a dour one it is.”

Having thanked the old lady we took our departure, and here it may be stated that what she said was perfectly correct as far as the ghost was concerned, for it troubled us no more, while as Tom had given up the Castle for a fresh place before another third year came round, we have had no means of ascertaining if other tenants have been honoured by the same embarrassing attentions.

To continue my narrative of the events of the

day, it must now be stated we had excellent sport, and after bagging one hundred and seven brace of grouse, we were well pleased with ourselves as we turned into the avenue of fine beech trees leading up to the house, along which we saw Surrey hastening to meet us. As he approached, there was a something in his manner which stopped the shout of merry welcome we were about to give, and as he came yet nearer, Tom's salutation was—

“What's the matter, Surrey? Something is wrong, I'm sure.”

With much emotion and in broken tones he replied—

“Oh, Berks! I hardly know how to tell you; but there has been a terrible accident in the forest; for, alas! poor Donald——”

But having got thus far, Surrey was so completely overcome that he could not continue his narrative, and he rushed from us into the house.

Further down the path at a side-door we saw a cart surrounded by a small crowd of men, and on

joining the group we learnt to our horror that the vehicle held the corpse of poor Donald. In vain did we try to gather details of the accident; some said "the gentleman did it," some that Donald was himself the cause — while others told the wildly improbable story that it was the royal stag of Corrie-na-vaich that had himself done the deed. Unable to gather anything definite, Tom whispered me to go in and look after Surrey, whilst he attended to other matters that required arranging on an emergency like this. With a sad heart I made my way to Surrey's room, and having done my best to comfort him, he presently told me the following account of the tragedy, which I relate, as nearly as possible, in his own words—

"At our very first spy, to Donald's great delight, we found a fine Royal stag, well known to the neighbouring foresters as the monarch of Corrie-na-vaich, and I learnt he was renowned for his wily ways, for though he had been stalked times without number and had been thrice fired at, he had on

each occasion escaped scatheless. We were soon within shot of the monarch, who this time did not display any extraordinary cleverness, but as he was feeding end on to me I could not take the shot at once. I noticed Donald was pale with excitement, and was already trembling for the result, which did not tend to make me any the steadier.

“When, however, the monarch at last presented his broadside to me, I felt every confidence as I pressed the trigger; alas! he fell only to rise again, and dash off with his fore leg smashed right high up in the shoulder; as he still kept side on to me, I put in the left barrel with great steadiness, but that also failed to end the matter, and then turning the glass on to him, it was easy, in the bright light, to see the two bullet marks—the first was some inches to one side of the heart and a good bit below, while the second had struck in a line with the heart but just behind it. After this short spy Donald urged me to load again at once, saying, ‘He’s yours, sir, if we can but head him before •

he gets to the march,' and then off he started at his best pace.

"We soon sighted the wounded monarch, and it was clear that as he could not make much upward progress, he was putting on all steam he could down hill, with the view of reaching a pass at the end of the corrie, through which he could escape into the next forest. Now, I am a bad runner, Gee, as you know, so I saw at once that unless we could get along faster than we had done the stag would make good his retreat, therefore calling to Donald, I said, 'Here, take you the rifle, but be careful, for the stops are not on, and get away by yourself and cut him off; I'll follow as fast as I can.' Donald required no urging, and seizing the rifle out of my hand he bounded off like a roe-deer, while I watched him out of sight round the shoulder of the hill, with the pleasant conviction that the monarch would now be mine. Then I trotted on after him till I reached the place where he had disappeared, and finding that from this point I

could command the whole of the corrie, I sat down, pulled out the glass, and soon spied Donald some four hundred yards off, running up to the stag, who was lying in a small basin-shaped hole of moss apparently quite dead, for his head was hanging down with one of the antlers resting on the soft edge of the shallow. In this position the stag lay when Donald reached him, and while he was pulling out his knife the monarch just raised his head from the ground but a little way as if in a last expiring effort.

“Then Donald quickly, and alas! all too rashly, placed the butt of the rifle on the antler lying at his feet, and to my surprise the dying beast instantly half raised himself upright and made a most furious blow at the weapon. I heard the clink the horn made as it struck, then the next second came a report, and Donald fell forward right on the top of the yet struggling stag. Down hill I dashed as fast as my legs would carry me, but, alas! only to find the poor fellow lying stone dead with a bullet

right through his heart. I pulled him as well as I could on to a mossy bank, and then, as soon as I had satisfied myself he was past all aid, I hastened off to the shepherd's cottage; fortunately he was not out, while moreover, he had two other men with him for the purpose of gathering the lambs next day, and thus between us by our united exertions we bore our sad burden to the roadside. That is all, Gee, and I never felt so unhappy in all my life," said poor Surrey.

Needless to relate, this sad event cast a gloom over our hitherto happy party, and the last evening before it broke up was a melancholy one. The ladies retired early, while in silence we men went to the smoking-room, for poor Donald had been a favourite with every one. As we filed into our sanctum, Tom gave me a tap on the shoulder and pointed to the hall door, and we were quickly alone in the open air. "Gus, old fellow," said he, "I want you to do me a favour; you see we cannot resume shooting till after the funeral, so, as my friends

are due to leave to-morrow, will you come as my guest to Loch Leven for a few days, and we can return on the first of September?" And thus it was arranged.

25th.—After Tom's guests had started off, he and I departed for Kinross, and arrived there the same evening. Miss Kent stayed with Mrs. Berks and the children.

26th.—Kinross. There was nothing of Loch Leven visible from our hotel; however, we sat down to breakfast well pleased to be removed for awhile from the depressing influences of fatal accidents and ghosts. The room was cheerful, full of sunshine, and looked on to a small garden of flowers, and while Tom strode up and down, eating his porridge in orthodox Scotch fashion, he said to me, "It is awfully good of you to come, Gus, for I fear the fishing will be somewhat of the cockney order!" and laughingly I replied, "Well, yes, I suppose we shall stand a good chance of hooking, or being hooked by, the fishers in the next boats, for

with such a lot of them afloat they must get in the way of each other."

From this it will be seen neither of us was greatly impressed with the quality or quantity of the sport in front of us, and it was with no great keenness we went to the Loch.

On our arrival at the pier and boat-house, from which all anglers had to start, a white-haired old Scotchman gave us a hearty welcome while telling us the other boats were already away; then conducting us to a long wooden building, he entered our names, addresses, and the time of day in a ledger, and that ceremony finished he asked if we were in want of flies, and directing our attention to the walls of the room, there we saw hanging on nails many rows of cast-lines, each ready mounted with four flies—for on Loch Leven it is *de rigueur* to use that number. They struck us as good and cheap, therefore we purchased plentifully in the hope they might strike the trout also. Most of the casts contained at least one of the favourite flies of

the Loch, such as "The Zulu" and "The Hecham Pecham."

Then we went to the boat, and to our astonishment we saw Loch Leven was anything but the small loch we had imagined; why we had pictured it to ourselves as insignificant, goodness only knows, but we had done so, and were agreeably disappointed at viewing a fine big sheet of water, which we learnt from the guide-books covered more than three thousand acres of ground. As for the crowd of boats, there were but four or five in sight, the others being hidden in distant bays, or by Queen Mary's Island. Thus far we were both greatly pleased, and Tom cheerfully remarked, "It looks much more like business than I expected; and how very well everything is arranged."

Then we put ourselves into the hands of two clean, well-spoken boatmen, and as they expressed a wish "to pull west," we consented. They put their backs into the business and soon rowed us three miles from the pier, then they turned the

boat broadside to the wind, shipped their oars, and while they began to fill their pipes the head man said—

“Now, gentlemen, fish away, for it should be a good day”

We were both soon at work, and the trout rose well, but although we were old hands at loch-fishing, we missed a good many, and in reply to an enquiry as to whether the fish were not coming very short that morning, we got for answer—

“Oh, no, sir, not at all; but ye don’t strike hard enough for this loch.”

The hint was taken, and from that time forth we hooked almost every fish that rose, and it became evident the Loch Leven trout were quicker in their rise and sharper in detecting the falsity of the lure than the trout of other Scotch lochs, and to make a basket the angler should strike very quickly and almost roughly.

After drifting three-quarters of a mile from the shore the rises became few and far between; the

water looked too deep and black for successful fishing, but our boatmen, who were happily puffing away, assured us to the contrary, and we continued to whip on, but nevertheless nothing came, and, after a long spell of no sport, it was not till we neared the shore facing us that we once more got plenty of rises. We disembarked to eat our lunch, while on counting our fish we found we had sixteen, weighing just over thirteen pounds.

As soon as the men were out of hearing Tom remarked, "Don't you think they are rather a lazy couple? Since they pulled us out to get the wind they have but sat and smoked, and let the boat drift for more than two hours. I'm sure there are no fish to speak of in that deep black water; so after lunch I vote we try the plan of taking short drifts, and never going more than a few hundred yards from the shore."

To this I replied, "Depend on it, the men won't think much of your idea, as it will give them five times the work to do, and as we must

not make them sulky, suppose you go and square them."

Thereupon Tom went to our boatmen and said, "Now, look here, my men, I've a fancy to work the boat on a plan of my own this afternoon, so no blame to you if there is no sport; it will be harder work though, and therefore you shall each have half-a-crown extra for your trouble."

This settled matters as we wished, so getting afloat once more we kept rowing five or six hundred yards from the shore and drifting in again, covering fresh ground at each drift. So well did this answer that when we landed at the pier we had forty-seven fine trout, averaging just under a pound each. We were both of us delighted with a very good day's sport, for the fish fought well, frequently splashing high out of the water or dashing under the boat at great speed thus necessitating a quick eye and steady hand to defeat these troutish tricks.

Moreover it was pleasant to learn from the pier-master that the new comers and lazy starters had

yet brought back more than any other boat, and I fear as long as there are fishermen there will ever be feelings of this nature. Old Izaak Walton had the sentiment in his day and boldly expressed it, for he wrote, "I envy but him, and him only, that catches more fish than I do," so, therefore, his disciples of three hundred years later may surely own up to the soft impeachment without feeling abashed.

The weight and number of our fish having been duly entered in a book, the pier-master then asked if we wished to send any away, for labels and boxes were ready and the railway close by. We availed ourselves of the opportunity, and once more dilated on Loch Leven good management; then we paid for our sport, half-a-crown an hour for each rod—thus as we had been afloat eight hours, the calculation of the amount was an easy one—and wishing the pier-master good night, we returned to our hotel with very altered ideas of Loch Leven fishing, which we now voted to be perfectly

arranged, devoid of cockney surroundings, while giving as good sport as is to be had with brown trout on any loch in Scotland.

27th, 28th, 29th.—On each of these days we fished away merrily, and sticking to our system of short drifts we continued to do well. Our total for the four days was 157 trout, weighing 136 lbs.

On landing from our second day's sport we had a novel experience. Thirty-eight fish, weighing just that number of pounds, was our take, so as we had supplied as many friends as we could think of on the first day, we were about to give half of this lot to our boatmen and the rest to the hotel, but on telling the pier-master of how we intended disposing of our basket, we learnt that the Fishery Association allowed anglers one shilling a pound for all fish not wanted, and the idea of selling our take and getting our sport for nothing was so novel, and amused us so much, that we let the pier-master take the fish and cried quits with him; for on that day we had only been fishing seven

hours, and as the odd three shillings went to one of the boatmen, the two accounts exactly balanced.

30th, Sunday.—We passed the morning in packing up, and the rest of the day in strolling by the loch-side, when of course, as it was not a fishing day, the trout, as is their custom on the Sabbath, were rising furiously. Then, at the fearfully early hour of six o'clock, we took our seats at the table d'hôte: this we had been most specially asked—I might almost say commanded—to do by the hotel-keeper, for he let us see pretty plainly there would be a "deeficulty" in getting a later dinner served in our own room on the Sabbath. Of course we had boiled haddocks, roast beef, and stewed prunes, three luxuries which appear to be indispensable at all Scotch table d'hôte dinners. The company was pleasant enough, and so much so, that at the end of the repast we followed the rest into the smoking-room, where naturally trouting talk was soon the absorbing topic of conversation, while whiskey

hot, cold, and with soda-water, lent an embellishing hand to many of the stories.

There were amongst the company three friends in particular who, according to their own account, had caught heavier and larger numbers of trout than anyone else who was present. They were also great at all athletic sports, and at length one of them related a story of a leap so extraordinary as to call forth from a listener an exclamation of "Impossible, sir! it could not be done."

On him the teller of the story turned fiercely, and cried in angry tones, "Pray, sir, do you doubt my word?"

"Oh, no, not at all," answered the other, "only I feel sure you *must* have made a mistake somewhere."

"Oh, *do* you; you little know what we can do till you see for yourself," retorted the athlete; and, rising to his feet, he continued: "Look here, sir, if you would like to see an exhibition of leaping, I'll bet you a couple of bottles of whiskey, to be

drank by the present company, that I'll find you a man in this very room who shall jump through the open door and touch the top of it with his foot as he goes through."

Here the speaker turned to one of his friends and gave him a look which was tantamount to saying, "You can do that easily enough, can't you?" Then resuming his speech, with a bang of his fist on the table, he wound up by saying—"And, by George, if he doesn't do it he shall pay forfeit." The sceptical gentleman at once took the bet, with the stipulation it should be put down in black and white, and this being done, it was read out to the whole room.

Reader, I wonder if you have been sharper than we were, and discovered the "sell" for yourself. No sooner were preliminaries over, than the layer of the bet turned to the taker and said, "All right, sir, *you* do it; all *I* betted was that *I* would find the man, and that if *he* didn't do it, *he* was to pay forfeit."

As the astonished taker of the wager grasped the situation, he held out his hand to the winner and led the laughter which went round the room, while Tom and I felt thankful we had escaped being trapped, for neither of us nor any of the company had seen the catch in the matter, although it had been clearly stated to everyone.

31st.—We left Kinross early, and picking up three fresh guests at Perth — Charles Lewes, Thomas Dyke, and William Patcham—we all duly arrived at Strathmaacoe, where a warm welcome awaited us from Mrs. Berks and Miss Kent, who assured us the ghost had departed. Lewes and Patcham seemed strong active men, but Dyke looked ill, and was distinctly very lame, while later on I discovered he had come more to recruit his health, after a bad accident, than to stalk or shoot. Laughingly he told Tom that in addition to his valet, he had brought his perambulator and nurse, in the shape of a strong young man, to push it.

It was settled from this day forth we were to go

at the deer with a will. Some ten miles away was a stoutly-built forest lodge, and there in couples we were to take it in turns to spend three days of each week. The start was tossed up for, and the coin decided that Tom and Lewes should have first chance in the forest.

September 1st.—Whilst I was yet dressing, the stalking party drove off, so I hurried down to join Patcham, for we had been asked to make the best bag of grouse we could, either over dogs, or by walking in line, or kiteing. As we were starting Dyke hobbled into the hall, gun in hand, and said—

“Can you give me any idea of your line of country to-day, for if I knew which way you were working the ground, I should like to try and get where I might have a chance of a driven shot now and then.”

We told him all we knew, and expressed our fear that the hill track would be too rough for his chair; but to this he replied—

“Oh! I have had an extra strong one made, so

I will risk it, while if you will only beat along that face by the trackside, I feel sure I shall get a shot or two."

Wishing him luck, we sallied forth leaving him being jolted in his chair along the rough path, and we soon lost sight of him. About an hour afterwards an old cock rose wild in front of us to disappear straight ahead, and when a few seconds later we heard Dyke's gun, we were both pleased and astonished at finding he had got into such a good position, for it was certain many more birds would take the same line of flight. This proved to be the case, and by the time we neared Dyke we had counted several double shots with some single ones—thirteen discharges in all.

Patcham said to me, "I wonder what he has bagged. Hallo! why look, there is his bath-chair on the track below, and flying a white flag, although it is empty; and there, further on, is Dyke's man with a flag also. Well, that is clever; don't you see the dodge? he has left them there to turn the



birds from the road and force them to come to himself; while under yon stone, our friend is sitting snugly in the heather; but what on earth is he up to, Gee? for he is crawling about on all-fours, just like a bear."

I noticed all that Patcham pointed out, and replied, "Come along, let us go and see what it all means."

By the time we reached our friend he had finished his crawling, and was puffing a cigarette, and, in reply to our enquiries as to whether he wanted the dogs to find any birds, he smilingly said—

"No, thanks; you saw me doing retriever for myself, for I find it less painful to crawl than to walk, and I've picked up my birds. I had quite a good stand, and got six brace. Would you let one of the men put them in the panniers?"

We both exclaimed, "Bravo, indeed! but pray do not overdo it or knock yourself up;" but he would not hear of going back, so we lunched to-

gether on the roadside, and then, for the rest of the day, we worked our ground almost entirely to put birds over Dyke—for his misfortunes, his pluck, his good shooting and masterly management of the bath-chair enlisted all our sympathies, and we were only too glad to give him all possible sport. Our total bag was fifty-three brace, thirteen of which were Dyke's, who was wheeled home in the best of spirits.

2nd.—We shot in the same way as yesterday, with about a similar result.

3rd.—Our beat this day was too far and inaccessible for the bath-chair. Dyke went ferreting, and killed more than one hundred bunnies out of his perambulator, to the great surprise of the keepers. Tom and Lewes returned from the forest late this evening, having got nine stags, and amongst them a good "royal" and a "caberslach."

4th.—As Patcham and I were preparing to start for the forest early this morning, Dyke appeared on the scene, saying—

"Should you mind if I joined your party? Of course I can't stalk, or even keep near you, but I should like to spend a few days in the forest, and have a peep at the deer through the glass. Perhaps I might even see something of the sport from a distance, for I know enough about it not to get in the way." Needless to say, we took him, and were only too glad of his company.

At the entrance to the forest a stalker was waiting, so Patcham alighted and was quickly off, while we drove on to the lodge, where I was to meet the head forester for my day. Another four miles saw us at the end of our journey, and then, as we were about to start after the deer, Dyke looked so longingly at the tops of the big hills surrounding us on all sides that I was tempted to suggest he should take a seat on the deer saddle of the pony standing ready to go with us, and return in the same way after we had gone a certain distance along the forest track. His face brightened as he jumped at the invitation, and the procession was soon winding,

in single file, round the base of the steep hill, and, on clearing the shoulder, we could see up into a good-sized corrie.

At this point we halted, as from here Dyke was to turn back, and so, while the forester was giving some directions to the pony-man as to where to expect us later, I pulled out my glass and immediately found three small stags feeding in a burn not a mile off. As they had not seen us, we drew out of sight while the forester took a peep, but only to pronounce them unshootable. Then we all three crawled up and re-inspected them, when Dyke, with a longing look, said, "By Jove! if there had been a shootable beast in the lot, I really believe I could have got up to him." On hearing this, I fell back and asked the head forester to give my friend a shot, for even though he did kill a small beast, I felt sure our host would not mind as long as it gave pleasure to his disabled guest.

Here Dyke joined us again, and Angus—for that was the forester's name—said to him, "There's just

one of them, sir, that might be worth a shot, and Mr. Gee tells me ye hae a fancy to try it, and there's sma' doobt but what we can get up to them if you are still of the same mind ; but, sir, it is just only the one I point out to you that you must take."

Dyke was delighted, so dropping on his hands and knees, he crawled the whole distance with hardly a halt. Angus took him up well to a capital position about eighty yards off the quarry, and then, putting the rifle into his hand, whispered—

"There, take that one to the west."

"Which *is* west?" murmured Dyke.

"The one on the knowe, sir, the nearest of the three," answered Angus.

Dyke laid the rifle, and as the report rang out the stag dropped, then while the two others were bolting at full speed, crack went the left barrel, which brought down one of them, and before Angus could expostulate the rifle was reloaded, and discharged for the third time with deadly effect.

Dyke looked round with a grin on his face and said—

“All right, Angus! I will make it square with Mr. Berks. I don’t suppose I shall ever fire at a deer again, so I thought as the chance offered I would have a real go for the last time.”

As we all stood up, behold! the two victims of the two last bullets also jumped to their feet and began to make off, each with a badly-broken hind leg—a wound which would not have dropped an old stag, or even made him wait for a moment. Thereon up sprang Dyke, and, rifle in hand, he made the best dash after them he could. Angus looked at me with a broad grin on his face as he said, “Why, sir, they are a’ three ganging along exoctly alike!” and true it was that Dyke’s infirmities and the stags’ wounds gave to each the same lurching, funny movement.

Exhaustion soon compelled Dyke to stop, and by this time a gillie with a deerhound had come up, so telling the man to slip him at one stag, Angus

dashed off up hill to keep an eye on the movements of the other. Left alone together, Dyke dolefully remarked—

“I really could not help it, Gee, although I know it is all wrong, so I only hope Berks will not be in a rage about it. However, let us go and look at the one that *is* dead.”

This we did. He was but a six-pointer, and the baby neck was covered with blood, for he had been shot in the back of the head—a “fluke,” of course. So we sat down by him to wait for the return of the others. Dyke took my rifle, and while admiring it this stag also suddenly came to life again, for with a kick and a plunge he was galloping off before we had realised the situation. In vain Dyke emptied both barrels after him; and then before he could reload he had unsighted us, while in spite of Dyke’s long face, I could not help laughing, but he did much the reverse, the while vowing the stags in Strathmaacoe forest bore charmed lives.

After some time we saw Angus returning, and when he joined us we heard he only thought he knew where his stag was resting, for it was a long way off; then we told him our story, which sent him off with the rifle to see if he could discover the one that had shammed dead.

Dyke threw himself on the heather, remarking dejectedly, "Confound my stupidity, Gee; I quite hate myself for having spoilt your whole day's sport."

I comforted him, however, so successfully that at length we both broke into uncontrollable laughter over the whole thing. Then the gillie with the dog returned with one bit of good news, for "Torrum" had run his deer down, and it was lying gralloched some distance away. We tobaccoed and whiskied the gillie, who then went off to look what Angus was doing, and as he reached the sky line we heard a shot echo through the hills, while as but one barrel sounded we felt pretty sure that stag number two was also accounted for. In due course Angus

rejoined us to confirm this supposition, when we further heard that the first bullet had but grazed the skin on the top of the head, and, though letting blood freely, it had produced but temporary insensibility; then, looking hard at the unabashed Dyke, Angus slyly said—

“Hech, sir, you will aye find it better to shoot at the heart of a stag than the heid,” which was his own way of combining politeness with sarcasm.

It was now past two o'clock, so as Dyke was looking dead tired, although he was all for our going in pursuit of the third stag, I insisted on his hobbling back to the pony.

Having started our friend on his way home, as Angus then opined it was too late for us to go further into the forest, we turned back on our tracks in search of the third stag, which after a long tramp we eventually spied, when another bullet ended his troubles. Thus, after all, Dyke secured his three stags at one stalk, which seemed almost impossible when each of them had turned out to

be "runners," for had they been big, strong stags we should have been lucky indeed to get even one of them.

We spent a merry evening, as Patcham had killed a good ten-pointer, while I knew I had made a fast friend of Dyke for life, and that being the case, I was, perhaps, more to be congratulated than either of the deer-slayers.

5th.—Patcham and I were both off by eight o'clock to our respective beats. Dyke was to breakfast late and fish the loch close by the lodge. The day was all that could be wished, cool, with a steady breeze, a good light, and blinks of sunshine. At a quiet pace we made our way to the hilltop, where we at once found deer, for near at hand five stags and some hinds were feeding. The stalk was easy, and the best stag, a fat eight-pointer, bit the dust. Angus performed the gralloch, whilst I sat down and soon spied a solitary stag coming into sight; he was going at a trot, but evidently had been disturbed by the sound of the recent

report, although not quite knowing from which direction the noise had come. I pointed him out to Angus, who promptly called out—

“Have a try for him, sir, while I finish my work ; it's a sharp run, but if you can reach the big stane yonder before he does, you will cut him off, for that will be his line, and I'm thinking you will get there in time.”

The aforesaid stone was about a mile in front of the stag, but much nearer to me than to him, so taking my bearings, I dashed off best pace. It was a down-hill run, the ground completely hid me, and I reached the spot puffing and blowing like a gram-pus, so settling myself in a happy position, I waited the issue of Angus' prophecy. But not for long, for I soon saw the quarry trotting exactly in the line foretold, and when he came broadside, as I pressed the trigger he rolled over stone-dead, so running up I bled him, and waited for the advent of Angus the prophet, who shortly put in an appearance, the while smiling proudly at the success

of his strategy, although he was polite enough to declare all his pleasure was derived solely from witnessing my part of the performance. Then we started again to get a third shot, and once more the bullet sped true.

Now, though it has taken but a short space to narrate the death of these three stags, it must not be forgotten we had had two stalks, a run in, and three beasts to gralloch, so, by this time, it was past two o'clock. Angus, however, was downright bloodthirsty that day, for, as we finished a hasty lunch, he jumped to his feet, saying—

“Well, sir, all last season no one rifle could get more than three beasts in the day to himself, but I think we shall manage to beat that now, so we'll start whenever you're ready.”

Nothing loth, I was on my legs at once, but in vain corrie after corrie was searched, for not another beast could we see, while by about half-past four we had explored all the likeliest places and were reduced to turning back. At this Angus was quite

depressed, but I could not in any way share his feelings, for three stags in one day should surely be sufficient, while I was even more than content. As we made for home Angus spied all the ground over again, but it was of no use, and we at last arrived at the edge of the range of the forest hills.

From where we stood we could see the lodge, a speck in the distance, while Dyke's boat was still fishing the loch, some three thousand feet below us. It was such a pretty scene of hill country that we were tempted to rest before commencing the long descent so trying to the knees, so we sat down at a spring and lighted our pipes, to repose awhile. Once again Angus pulled out his glass, and all feelings of fatigue left me as he said, "May be, sir, we shall yet get a fourth beast, for I can see a small stag feeding on the top of the Inch burn, though I doubt if the daylight will last us." I took the glass out of his hand and soon found the staggie, which was such a small beastie that I

at once began to consider whether after the good day we had had, it would not be more sportsmanlike to leave him in peace. On imparting these sentiments to Angus, I found he had set his heart on making up the four beasts, while he also told me the stag was bigger than his horns indicated, so I took another peep to inspect him afresh, when he made a sudden bolt in evident alarm, while over the sky-line in angry pursuit there came a splendid stag with a grand head. Nearly certain I could count royal points, I was about to proclaim my discovery to Angus, when it flashed across my mind how pressed we were for time, and as with all his skill he was yet a very excitable man, I feared it might make him rash if he suddenly heard of the presence of such a grand beast, so I kept my own counsel, and quietly shutting up his glass I handed it back, while remarking quite unconcernedly, "Well, Angus, if you wish to get up to him in time to see to shoot it must be a case of running, so go ahead as fast as you like."

Go, indeed, he did, but as it was down hill for a mile, I managed to live with him till the ascent began, and then Angus, like a gentleman, made the pace less severe, while, as he came to the top of the hill over which we expected to find our quarry, he had the wisdom to reduce it almost to a crawl, and by the time the summit was reached I had quite recovered my wind.

On hands and knees we crossed the sky-line, while yard by yard the precipitous sides of the Inch burn were searched, and horribly disappointed were we at finding our deer had probably fed nearer to the foot of the very steep hill. A worse place for a shot could not be imagined, and Angus whispered me that the last three stags killed here had all been smashed to bits by rolling down the hill-side after receiving the bullet.

There was nothing for it but to follow our quarry, so feet first and flat on our sides we commenced the descent, only soon to sight the back of a small stag. As long as he fed we slithered nearer to

him; the moment he lifted his head we were as immovable as the big stones around us. At length we were within a long shot of this staggie, while to my dismay nothing of the big fellow could be seen, and it became uncertain whether our quarry was lower down the hill or hidden from our view by a projecting spur of rock. Just for fun, with no intention of firing, I put the rifle to my shoulder, when to my surprise Angus' long arm glided round me and depressed the muzzle to the earth, while a hurried whisper came to my ear, "There is another one just a wee bit better."

Now as I also knew there was another and a very much better one, I chuckled to myself at the thought of the surprise it would be to Angus if we succeeded in killing the royal. The situation was, however, getting critical and would speedily have to be decided, for it was growing dusk so rapidly that unless the small stag would kindly move out of the way it would be impossible to make a further advance without letting him into the secret of our

presence, and in that case he would be certain to impart his discovery to his friends below.

For some precious minutes we remained immovable, while hoping the little brute would take himself off, but he kept on placidly browsing, while each mouthful he took was accompanied on our parts by anything but blessings on his head. Dusker and dusker it grew, and matters began to look very black; so much so, that I thought of confiding all about the royal to Angus, with the view of taking hurried counsel and attempting some rash or daring manœuvre. My own idea was to put the rifle at full cock, and then with fingers fast set between hammers and strikers, to make a dash down hill, trusting to luck to get near enough to the big stag to take a shot before he could run out of range. As I turned to whisper my plans, I saw two other good-sized stags coming up from the base of the hill to join the party above them, for in addition to the small stag with the big one there were also a lot of hinds. Angus had seen them too, and whispered me in sad

despairing accents, "Hech, sir, if it were but later in the season the other stag would soon put them awa, and show us where he was." As he finished speaking the two intruders came to a halt, while the provoking little staggie that had delayed our advance disappeared with a caper; then the next second we heard the clatter, the thud, and the rush of a heavy beast in his gallop, accompanied by snorts of rage and defiance, while the two stags in the distance turned to fly.

It was clear that the sounds we heard came from behind the projecting rock, so now our anxiety was as to whether the stag would continue his pursuit far enough down the hill to bring himself to our view. It was clear if he did put in an appearance we should be absolutely in full view of each other, so the full-cocked rifle was already at my shoulder as, after a few seconds of suspense, he bounded into sight about a hundred yards below me. He came thundering down the hill fairly broadside on, and excited as I was, it was yet im-



possible to help admiring the spectacle, for though we were as motionless as the rocks around us, he "picked us up" in an instant, and brought himself to a sudden halt with his fore legs planted stiff and wide in front of him, with his head turned directly on us. We were equally quick to see we were detected, and realized that in another second he would bolt down-hill to be lost to view. Alas! for him that second of hesitation was his death warrant, for the rifle spoke in the very nick of time, and he fell to all appearance stone dead. Quickly lowering the hammer of the left barrel and putting the stop on, we dashed down-hill with lengthy leaps to where he lay, only to reach him just as the sinewy hind legs began to kick in vigorous convulsions; on to one of them Angus flung himself, while I seized his horns and fixed his head to the earth, so thus between us we held him till the knife could be got at. A few minutes later the gallant stag lay prone on the now nearly dark hill-side, and we began to realize the good luck that had befallen us,

for at our feet was a splendid thirteen-pointer, which next day, without heart or liver, scaled seventeen stone.

Then I turned mockingly to Angus while saying, "Well, now what do you think of *my* little stag? I saw him when you told me to take a look at the small one, but I kept it dark, to give you a pleasant surprise." The reply came—"Hech, sir, but it's just the verra same stag I was hoping to get you a chance at. You see, sir, it was like this—I hae so often seen the sicht of such a gran beast as this mak my gentlemen all o'er of a tremble, that I just telled ye it was but a staggie we were after; but surely, sir, ye did not see him too, for he went out of sicht before I passed you my glass."

To this I answered, "Yes, Angus, but he came back again, and so I kept the matter dark, for I, too, have sometimes seen the sight of such a splendid stag make the best of stalkers rash, especially when he had to do his work against time; so we

can each laugh at the other and cry quits over our thirteen-pointer. So now for a taste of Glenlivet before we drag him down the hill."

It took us a good hour to haul our prize to the pony, and, though aching arms with want of breath more than once called a halt, we laughed at all troubles the while we cared not a jot how late home we should be. The shot had indeed been a lucky one, for on examination we found the bullet had gone high and smashed the spine directly over the heart, while two inches higher would have made it a miss altogether; moreover, it was almost the only wound that would have assured a few moments of absolute immobility; for, had the bullet been fair in the heart, the chances are the stag would have run a few paces at least, and then in his fall he would have launched himself rolling down hill, to be dashed to pieces like his predecessors. Our luck had also been the greater as it is but seldom stags notice each other so early in the season, for, as a rule,

their jealousies do not commence until quite a fortnight later.

At the foot of the descent the pony-man met us, so all three lending helping hands our quarry was quickly strapped on the saddle, while in the best of spirits, a merry party stumbled home in the dark. On the way I confided to Angus that though I had killed plenty of deer, including several royals, yet the twelve points had never been exceeded, and that I was under a solemn vow the first time I broke the spell by killing a stag with more than a dozen points, to present the stalker with a bottle of whiskey for each point, so then, asking him what brand of mountain dew was his own peculiar weakness, I got for answer, "Thank you kindly, sir, it will be seven-year-old Glenleevet that I'll be taking."

6th, Sunday.—This was a day that passed slowly in our forest lodge. Of letters I had none to write, but not so the other two, for the moment breakfast was done my companions were hard at work with

their pens ; so I strolled quietly down the loch side, enjoying the sunny scenery, while rejoicing in the mere fact of being alive and in the possession of my senses. For was not each one gratified this lovely morning? The sight, by the beauties of Nature and the blue smoke as it curled from my pipe ; the hearing, by the croaking of a raven in the distance, mingled with the cackling of the old cocks as they rose from the heather in front of me ; the taste, by tobacco ; the smell, by the indescribably refreshing scent of peat, moss, and heather ; the feeling, by the pleasant sensation of breathing fine air, when walking in robust health over ground as soft as velvet to the tread. As the end of the loch was neared it brought me close to the rough road-side, where I met "the meenister," seated by his man, in a two-wheeled species of buggy. The reverend gentleman pulled up to converse with me, and as I noticed the dimensions of his conveyance, all fear of being offered a lift to the kirk was dispelled, for I was aware he was on his way to hold

a service at the head of the glen. Now, lest from this my readers may put me down as a heathen, it must be stated that the aforesaid service was to be a Gaelic one. But thrice only have I attempted to worship in that language, and the pronunciation with the intonation of the unknown tongue so reminded me on each occasion of my friend the famous Tweed fisherman, the late Mr. Thomas Tod Stoddart, and *his* Gaelic sermon, that I could never successfully resist the spirit of laughter the reminiscence called up ; for Mr. Stoddart, though acquainted with but a few words of the language, had got a way of imitating a Gaelic "discoorse" which was so realistic and yet so comical, that it never failed to convulse his hearers with laughter. I told the minister the story of the thirteen-pointer and sent him off to his congregation with a promise of venison to take home, if he would call for it at the lodge on the return journey, for Tom had told us to offer him some if any of us met him.

He continued his way while I went mine, and,

arrived at the end of the loch, I followed on down the banks of the river running out of it; some ten miles away this Rhora stream joined the Spey, and later on in the season plenty of salmon come up to spawn.

For more than a mile I wandered on in the same happy spirit of contentment, when suddenly all feelings of that sort were scattered to the winds by the sight of a fine bright salmon leaping high in the air. I sat down by the bank of the pool to watch, and again and again he came to the surface, a twenty-pounder I was well-nigh sure, for at times he sprang far out of water and showed his goodly proportions, whilst more often he sent great oily swirls around him as he made those quiet rises which are maddening to a fisherman when witnessed with no rod in his hand. Bother! said I to myself; he will be absolutely certain to take the very first fly that comes over him; then, reader, with sorrow I confess it, there entered my head the wicked idea of having a try for him that very afternoon, even

though it was the Sabbath, and I jumped up and hastened home.

The two letter-writers had commenced luncheon, so hurrying through mine I sneaked off to the gun room, where I knew there was a four-jointed trout rod, which, I was glad to find, when the joints were tied together and left separated by about a foot of string, would hang round my neck, two on each side of me, without showing below the skirts of a long macintosh coat. A short gaff was hidden up one of the sleeves, while with fly-book and reel in pocket, I hastened off to my salmon pool. No one saw me depart, and though it was hot work walking in the waterproof coat, I was soon at my destination. The pool was some three hundred yards away from the roadside, but quite hidden from view by high banks, so taking a look round to see the coast was clear, I plunged down the brae, and in a short time a small "Jock Scott" on a yard of very stout salmon gut was hanging from the end of the rod. After letting the gut soak for

a few minutes I began to cast, when, just as anticipated, the fish took the fly greedily the moment it came over him.

Then the fun began, while all thought of the Sabbath was forgotten. With a great dash the fish left the pool to make down stream, but the going was good, so I kept with him, although he went faster than was pleasant. After a run of about two hundred yards we came to another big pool, and as it was also well hidden from view of the road, I was pleased when my fish showed an inclination to stay, and there he sulked, jiggered, sailed round and round, sprang out of the water, and tried all the dodges known to salmon to free himself, until, after some thirty minutes passed in this way, he began to weaken, and if I had had but a lengthier gaff, or a longer, stouter rod, the contest would now have been speedily ended, but it is a very difficult matter to bring a not quite exhausted fish up to a short gaff with a ten-foot trout rod. At last I made a try with the gaff, only to miss him, while as I did

so I was electrified by a voice at my elbow saying, "Steady, steady, Mister Gee, or you'll lose him. Please gie me the gaff"; and suiting the action to the word, the minister—for it was no less a personage, and I should have as soon expected to see Old Nick himself—had the fish cleverly ashore in a second; as I called out, "Well done, sir!" the good man looked half ashamed, but smiled bashfully as he said, "Aweel, Mr. Gee, it would have been a pity indeed to lose so fine a fish; but I shall be obleeged to you if you will not mention my interference in the matter."

Of course I agreed, and how that fish was caught, or by whom it was gaffed, has ever remained a mystery in Strathmaacoe forest, for reaching home unperceived in the dusk, I took my prize to my bedroom, wrapped it in a clean towel, locked it in a portmanteau, and then, in the dead of night, when the household was snoring, I carried it on tiptoe to the larder, where it was safely deposited on a stone slab.

The minister's appearance on the scene was accounted for by his seeing the top of my rod flash over the bank in the sunlight, and being alone on the return journey, having given his man leave to stay the rest of the day with some relations, he had left his trap on the roadside, well aware that his horse would stand for ever, and had come post-haste, full of indignation, to discover which of his parishioners was breaking the Sabbath-day. Sad to relate, that, somehow or other, Dyke got the credit of killing this fish, but the shameless chap took quite kindly to the idea, and did all he could to encourage the supposition.

Thus ended my first and last Sunday fishing in Scotland. To those people who do not fish, it may be surprising that I risked damnation for a paltry twenty-pound salmon; to those people who do fish it may seem odd that I did not devote other Sundays to the same sport; thus, as there is no just pleasing every one, I hope both fisher and no fisher will each forgive me for a first offence.

7th.—Whilst finishing an early breakfast, a shepherd's lad called at the Lodge on his way down the glen, to tell us there were a great lot of stags on the far end of the beat that was to be mine that day, so I started with Angus forthwith for the spot indicated. On arriving at our destination, after spying the deer, we found the lad's stags were all hinds, for not a horn could be seen in the lot! Angus having duly blessed that boy, informed me there remained nothing else to do but gain the heights above us, and work our beat towards home, and thus, as there was nothing to be seen, by two o'clock our ground was exhausted, and I was hastening back to the Lodge for an afternoon with Dyke on the Loch. Just on reaching home, we saw a figure cross the sky-line of the hill in front, and the glass showed it was Patcham's gillie bounding down with hasty strides; he was soon with us, when we learnt from him that "Mr. Patcham was just aal wrang the morn," for he had missed two good beasts, while about an hour since he had

"haunched" a third, a fine ten-pointer, which had made off as if intending to cross into the next forest.

Patcham and his stalker were therefore some four miles away, awaiting the gillie's return with the dog "Cruachan." Now this animal was no magnificently highly bred deer-hound, but simply an enormous rough-coated St. Bernard, with a wonderful nose, which made him a perfect tracker of a wounded deer, while, moreover, his pace was so good that no injured stag, if shown to him not more than a few hundred yards off, could live in front of him, and, unlike most deer-hounds, Cruachan would kill a stag quickly when once alongside of him. Telling the gillie to go for the dog, we said we would accompany him, and in a few minutes the four of us were climbing the steep hill-side at our best pace, while Angus having handed me Cruachan's lead to catch hold of, he strained at it to such a degree that he almost trotted me up to the summit. Once there, we started at a double, soon to reach the disconsolate Patcham with his equally depressed

attendant. The former received me grumpily enough, although, while we hastened to where the wounded stag was last seen, a few energetic remarks were whispered to me, distributing the blame of the misses pretty evenly between the rifle, the stalker, and a cock-grouse.

Then Angus took Cruachan, still in the lead, and showed him the track of the stag; the dog picked it up at once, and we all went forward at a trot, Angus holding on to Cruachan with all his strength. In this way we covered a long distance, but presently the redoubled impatience of the dog warned us we were nearing our quarry, and as we cleared the next hill-top there he was, full in view, not two hundred yards in front of us, going very sick towards the adjoining forest. As he had not seen us, we dropped flat while Cruachan's collar was unfastened, when with a growl of joy and a tremendous dash the dog sped headlong after his prey. As the stag saw him he quickened his pace, at which Angus merely laughed, as he said,

"He is ours now for certain," and we jumped up to follow the chase.

It was a down-hill run into a burn; on the opposite side there was a sharp rise, which hid the deer from Cruachan, and as he went thundering into the stream, behold! there started up, almost at his very nose, a fine, strong, unwounded stag, so small wonder that the dog with a desperate bound forward settled down to the pursuit of this one. It was the more provoking to watch, as this deer went off at right angles to the line of the wounded beast, and as we knew too well the difference there was between a cold stag and a sick one, we stood dejectedly watching pursued and pursuer until both disappeared.

Angus, however, vowed he would yet have the ten-pointer even if he followed him all night, so telling us that Cruachan, as soon as the cold stag had fairly given him the slip, would be certain to return to the spot at which he had left us, we all sat down to wait.

In about an hour the dog came back, apparently but little the worse for his run. He was promptly put on the lead and taken once more to the tracks of the ten-pointer; it was getting dusk, but that made no difference to Cruachan, who held the line of the deer correctly while leading us on till we were soon a long way in the next forest. Presently there were again signs of nearing our quarry, but it was so dusk that only objects on the sky-line could be discerned. The dog, however, strained so furiously at the lead that we felt sure of once more being close up with our victim, so Cruachan was slipped, the while Angus remarked, "We will just chance it; he surely must be near at hand."

Then we all stood still, with eyes intently fixed on the sky-line; suddenly the outline of the wounded beast appeared against the pale sky, and equally as suddenly we saw Cruachan bound on to his neck, when stag and dog rolled to the ground to be lost to view. We dashed up at best pace to find

the stag lying dead with his neck broken, while the dog lay placidly by the side of his victim, uninjured, and apparently the least excited of the whole party. Visions rose to my mind of what a painting Landseer would have made of such a group, but they were roughly dispelled by Patcham saying, "Oh, how I wish the light was stronger and that I had my Kodak!" and then we fell to laughing, talking, and patting Cruachan. By the time the gralloch was over, as it was quite dark, we held a council of war—for as we were not in our own kingdom, it was a debated question whether we should despatch our men with a pony from our lodge to bring home the stag next day, or send a note to the owner of the forest in which we were, to explain the circumstances, and leave it to him to settle what was to be done; for it was clear that if he or his guests were stalking that way the next day, the arrival of our pony would spoil their sport. Our gillie solved the difficulty by saying, "Hech, sirs, a night on the hull will no harm me,

so if ye'll leave Cruachan we can lie down together, and he will keep me warm. Then in the morning I can go to the lodge to tell the head forester what has happened, and beg the loan of a pony from him, which will bring the stag to our march after their party has spied the ground, if they should be coming this way." So it was agreed; therefore, leaving our two friends side by side, we started at once for home.

As we had to go fourteen miles in the dark, tumbles were numerous, while progress was slow, and just as the clock in the hall of our lodge was striking midnight we reached our destination pretty well "baked." Over a hasty mouthful of supper, Patcham confided to me he did not after all think so much of deer-stalking, for, said he, "I shall never get over missing those first two stags to-day, and then haunching the last one!"

We ought to have been at the Castle with our host this evening, but our non-appearance was unavoidable.

8th.—This morning we started for Strathmaacoe,

and met Tom and Lewes coming into the forest for their three days, so after explaining the reason of our delay, we continued our drive. On arriving at the house, we passed the remainder of the day in resting.

9th.—Rain fell in torrents, forcing us to stay at home, and Patcham, to my disgust, monopolised the smoking-room writing table nearly all the morning. My turn, however, came at last, and then in turning over the leaves of the blotting-book I discovered the following very feeble poetical effusion, but to my joy it was signed "T. Surrey," and therefore I publish it on purpose to annoy him, and in the belief that it will more than make us quits for his trick with the fox's brush.

A STALK IN STRATHMAACOE.

At start two miles uphill you go,
Hot tea with toast makes puff and blow;
And then, although you're boiling hot,
Down you sit in an east-wind spot.
Shivering hands pull out the glasses

To search the corrie, all the passes.
Then three miles off a stag you spy,
So for him you are bound to try.
The first mile's done at racing pace,
And then you struggle up a place
All stones and rocks and fearful steep;
A halt, and then begins a creep.
Half-bent double, crouching, crawling,
Through cold burns and peat bogs sprawling;
With panting breath, and aching back,
With pains that each tired limb doth rack;
At last within one hundred yards
You find the hind's keen eyes are guards
To keep you waiting where you lie
Till they feed o'er the line of sky.
At length they go! you raise your head,
Sink your elbow in a mossy bed;
Inch by inch the rifle you protrude,
Till to the stock your cheek is glued.
Then crack! rings out your number one,
And when you see no mischief's done,

Then crack! again speaks number two.
And there you lie and look most blue;
To think, in spite of all that crawl,
You've gone and missed him after all.

T. SURREY.

10th.—It still rained as if the Deluge was about to commence afresh. In the afternoon we sallied forth in macintoshes to the Rhora, each armed with a double-handed trout rod and a small Blue Phantom. Twenty-four hours' rain had swollen the Rhora stream into a big rolling river, rushing with resistless force to join the mighty Spey. Vague reports had reached us of monster trout that ascended this tributary of the Spey during the autumn floods—stubborn monsters which dwelt spring and summer through in the black depths of Loch Inch, but which might yet be captured when pushing their way up flooded rivers to their spawning grounds.

It was settled that Patcham was to begin at once and fish up stream, whilst I was to go some miles above to fish down till we met, so after an hour's

fast walking I commenced to try my luck. The water was of the darkest porter colour, and the gold sides of the phantom flashed pleasantly to the eye as it neared the surface. To fish in the river proper was useless, for it was just a raging torrent in which no fish could lie; but at varying intervals there were "croys" or small piers of stone built out into the stream to prevent the banks from being carried away by floods like the present one. At the back of each of these croys the current formed swirling quiet eddies on which white foam, dead leaves and bits of stick revolved round and round, and into these places I dropped my phantom, to let it sink, to bring it spinning to the surface again by a series of jerks from the top of the rod. Presently a black shadow flashed across the water and hid the lure, while the next second the rod was bent double, with the reel shrieking loudly as the fish dashed madly into the raging torrent, which carried him down stream faster than I could run. I did my best, but emptier and emptier grew

the reel, until the last yard went out, then the rod point bent almost to the water, and click! the fish had been torn from his hold by the force of the current. Much surprised at the evident size of the fish with the suddenness of the whole affair, I wound up to recommence operations, with a determination not to allow other fish to get into a torrent from which it was evidently impossible to land them. By the time I met Patcham I had had nine runs and landed six heavy trout, the largest of which scaled $7\frac{1}{4}$ lbs., while I found my friend with five others, the heaviest of which was $6\frac{3}{4}$ lbs.; the whole eleven averaged exactly four pounds each, and to this day these remain the best eleven trout I have ever seen brought to bank.

11th.—The black clouds still continued to shower down their contents, so Berks and Lewes returned from the forest early this morning, quite “washed out of it,” as they explained.

Up to this period but little chance had been given me of seeing anything of Lewes; this

morning, however, we fore-gathered, and, though he was but three-and-twenty, it was soon clear he was not only a keen sportsman, but a good naturalist as well, while as he had hotly taken up taxidermy, we passed a very pleasant hour or two together.

After lunch Berks, Patcham, and I started off to the Rhora, in the hopes of meeting a few more of the big trout, and Lewes sallied forth to stalk a blackcock or two for setting up. The trouting was a failure; Berks took a brace of good ones, which was the total bag, and driven in by the incessant rain, we were all soon seated round a good fire in the smoking-room.

When the dressing-bell sounded for dinner, as Lewes had not put in an appearance, we took it for granted he had gone straight to his room. Berks and Patcham started to change, while I stayed behind to finish a book, and, whilst thus left alone, the butler entered and said—

“Mr. Lewes desires me to say, sir, that he will

be much obliged if you would go up to him immediately."

Of course I at once complied, but on knocking at his door I found it locked, and in reply to the cry which announced my presence, I heard him come slowly across the room to unfasten the door, whilst he said in a low voice, "Come in quickly, Gee."

Entering the room with misgivings already gathering in my mind, I was horror-struck to see our friend had fallen back into an arm-chair close to the door, and that, while his face was deadly pale, his vest, shirt, and knickerbockers, which were of a light colour, were covered with large stains of blood. With a faint smile Lewes pointed with his right hand to his left arm, and then I saw that the entire forepart had disappeared. Hastening towards him, he looked quietly up into my face and said—

"It was all my own fault, Gee, but send for the doctor quickly, and promise me not to let my

mother know, or to alarm the ladies in the house ;" and then the poor fellow fainted.

Sharply, but not furiously, I rang the bell, which luckily the butler himself answered. Between us we lifted Lewes on to his bed, where he soon regained sufficient consciousness to swallow a good dose of whiskey. The butler, sworn to secrecy, was then sent off to despatch a carriage for the doctor. After a few minutes' thought, I saw it would be impossible to keep Tom in the dark, and that without his aid we should not be able to make sure of carrying out Lewes' wishes with regard to the ladies, so, scribbling a pencil note, I sent it off to Tom's dressing-room by a footman, and he was quickly with me. Of course as I could tell him nothing of how the terrible accident had happened, we could only wait in silence for the doctor's advent. On the floor in a roll laid Lewes' blood-stained shooting coat, so Tom, with the intention of putting it out of sight, stooped and lifted it by one of the skirt tails that was sticking up. As he

raised it the coat unrolled, and from it the missing portion of Lewes' arm fell with a thud on the floor at our feet. The gruesome sight turned us both nearly sick; but at that moment we heard footsteps coming towards the room, so, for fear of shocking others, Tom quickly flung the coat over the limb, while we rejoiced exceedingly when we found it was the noise of the doctor, for by great good luck our messenger had met him at the Castle gates as he was returning from his daily rounds.

Having forbidden Lewes to speak, the doctor made his examination and did his work in silence; then, taking Tom out of the room, he whispered that there was every reason to anticipate a good recovery, while he also wanted to know how the accident had happened, but on learning we could not even guess, he said, "Well, Mr. Berks, you will hear more presently, for some one must have helped him put the tourniquet on his arm, so no doubt whoever did that helped him here too." We

then told him of the severed limb, and remarking that it would never be of any further use to Lewes, the doctor returned to the room to wrap it in a towel, while promising to relieve us of its presence when he departed. Tom had already had wit enough to send word to the ladies to say dinner would be half an hour late, so, leaving the patient with the doctor, who promised to remain till we returned, we explained Lewes' absence and our delay by saying that, as he had come in with a bad shivering fit, we had stayed to see him comfortably in bed; and thus the wishes of our unfortunate friend were duly carried out, as for that night, at any rate, the ladies knew nothing of the accident.

After dinner we relieved the doctor, who having given me full instructions what to do in certain events, took his departure, the while expressing a strong opinion the patient would require no further attention till the following morning, and so, curled up in an easy-chair, I kept a night watch by the



wounded man. In a few days Lewes was in a fair way to recovery, and the moment he began to gain strength he insisted on telling us the story of the accident, which I repeat in nearly his own words. Said he:—

“I had had several stalks at the old blackcocks, but having been defeated each time, was making my way home crestfallen, when in one of the corn fields just outside the Castle gates I saw several fine old birds, so as they had not seen me, I began to stalk them. In attempting to do this I had to creep through a beech hedge, which offered such a stout resistance to my passage that I was forced to leave go of my gun to use both hands in clearing the way, and then in pulling it after me somehow or other it exploded, and I knew that my own carelessness had caused a nasty accident, for I felt instantly that my arm was smashed just below the elbow; there was but little pain, and although the rush of warm blood caused feelings of terror, I realised my only chance was to stop the flow.

Helped by the weight of the cartridges, I managed to slip off my coat, and fumbling in one of the pockets for a piece of old fishing line that I knew was there, I took one end between my teeth, while with the right hand I lashed it tightly round and round my arm till the bleeding stopped, then I took a good long pull at my flask with a sad enough look at my poor arm, and seeing that the fore part was hanging on by merely a bit of skin, I took my knife and severed it; the next moment I felt sorry for what I had done, so in the wild hope that it might yet be made to re-unite I wrapped the limb in my coat, and tottering to my feet, I stole home unseen, crept to my room, and sent for you."

"Well, Lewes, you are indeed a good plucked one," we both exclaimed in the same breath, and then, seeing that the long talk had tired him, we left him to rest.

Good nursing by kind friends soon put Lewes on his legs again, and it can be stated here that in

the following year he was shooting once more at Strathmaacoe, while his friends vowed he did better with one arm than with two; with extraordinary readiness also he learned "to do for" himself without his left hand, and apparently but one matter only caused him vexation or regret, and that was his inability to fashion his white dinner tie into a bow.

12th and 13th, Saturday and Sunday.—We rested both these days, and looked after our invalid.

14th, Monday.—Patcham and I went to the forest for the day. We both made handsome misses, so came back very grumpy.

On our way out to the forest as we neared the wire fence which divided it from the sheep ground, a turn of the road disclosed to view a small crowd of people who had evidently alighted from two good-sized brakes drawn up hard by. We at first took them for tourists, although we speculated what could have induced such an early pic-nic. As we drove up we saw the party had raised a white

post, and as they gathered round, it required no second glance to tell us what this upright was, for at right angles from it there projected a long white arm, on which was painted in large black letters, "Public Road to Kirknell." Some of the party were busily employed in planting this firmly in the earth, whilst the others indulged in much laughter with many jokes.

Promptly recognising that we were in the presence of a group of right-of-way maintenance gentry, we left our "machine" to join the party, who watched our approach with countenances expressive of mirth mingled with fear, for right well they knew their mission could be no pleasant one to Tom Berks or his foresters.

We found them a very civil, well-spoken lot of men, while their leader courteously informed us that from time immemorial there had been a road to Kirknell through the forest of Strathmaacoe. In this he was correct, but he omitted to state that the aforesaid road had never at any time been fitted

for wheeled traffic, and also he ignored the fact that for the last two hundred years the track had not been used except by an occasional shepherd. We very politely asked our informant to point out the road, and further inquired whether the party, together with the carriages, were about to start for Kirknell, and he smiled as he answered, "Well, no, sirs, not to-day; we are leaving it till others have worn the track plainer or made the road better."

We knew that all traces of the track disappeared a few yards from where we stood, and in the whole way through the forest only in two places did they again appear for a short distance, so no one could have found their way anywhere by following these indications. Then we parted with our right-of-way acquaintances, and in the dusk of the evening we found the sign-post at the entrance to the forest looking quite ghostly in brand new whiteness. On reaching home we learned from Tom he had met the whole brigade on their return journey, and after a short parley the company had

been invited to the Castle, where they were so well entertained that they departed singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow." With regard to this sign-post, I must now anticipate matters by stating that a few days later it was found drowned in the burn by the side of which it had stood so proudly for so brief a time.

The right-of-way division were unkind enough to say that the hands of wicked men had placed villainous saltpetre beneath their trophy and hence its downfall. The foresters of Strathmaacoe, however, hooted this theory to scorn, while vowing the stags themselves, alarmed at the prospect of a tourist-traffic through their quiet haunts, had combined together in a great charge on the white post, and had knocked it into the water. With grave concern Tom Berks heard both sides of the case, before he himself started off to inspect the scene of the disaster, and then after a most minute examination he arrived at the conclusion that lightning alone had been the instrument of des-

truction. Anyway, the sign-post has never been replaced.

15th.—This was a great day for Dyke and his perambulator, for as most of the corn was cut on one of the lowland beats, we three shot partridges in line, and as there were plenty of roads and lanes, by continually heading us Dyke secured many driven shots. It is true careless gunners might have peppered him, but when we mentioned the matter, he paid us the compliment of ridiculing the idea of three old hands making any such mistake. We had a very fine day's sport, getting no less than 171 head: made up of 115 partridges, 7 grouse, 25 hares, 4 ducks, 9 snipe, and 11 rabbits.

16th.—Alas, with waking thoughts came the remembrance that this day I was to say adieu to my kind host and hostess and all the pleasures of Strathmaacoe. Now as it cannot be disputed that leave-takings are odious if unavoidable necessities, I will refrain from describing my parting with Tom

and Mrs. Berks or their guests, but suffice it to say I sincerely hope some of my readers may come to the end of this diary with but one iota of the regret I felt at leaving my kind friends of Strathmaacoe.

CHAPTER V.

SALMON.

IN conjunction with some notions of my own, this chapter contains the opinions which many good and observant anglers have expressed to me verbally or by letter. Each and all, however, have been somewhat prone to preach from the narrow standpoint of some favourite river ; moreover, all hints and suggestions have reached me as detached items spread over a series of years ; in the interest, therefore, alike of salmon, netters and anglers I have endeavoured to marshal these facts and fancies into one solid phalanx.

Before proceeding further, however, I will ask permission of my readers to narrate the memoirs of an unusually intelligent, well educated salmon of

fifty-four pounds weight. We all know there are talking birds, the Scriptures tell us of a talking ass, while the Westminster Aquarium has recently advertised a talking horse, so for these reasons I must beg my readers to accept the assurance that the before-mentioned fish duly confided to me the following episodes of his life. It is my secret as to how such communication was made, and suffice it to say, as I am bent on silence, it remains but for my readers to remember the usual fate of the too pressing questioner.

Of course, also, every one is aware that birds, beasts and fishes can converse with each other, and although at the moment of first introduction an Indian Mahseer or a Florida Tarpon would not at once perfectly understand salmon language, yet they would get on better than a Highlander and a Matabele meeting for the first time. Here then, as nearly as possible in his very words, are the adventures of my friend the fifty-four pounder, who by the way was a male fish.



“My earliest recollections are of a rocky pool in the Dee, near Balmoral, where I saw many of my relations devoured by herons, big trout, and gulls, and it was only owing to our extra caution in taking advantage of the shelter offered by every large stone that I, with many others, escaped a similar fate.

“In addition to the enemies already enumerated, we learnt from the red deer, the grouse, and the rabbits, that as we grew older we should experience relentless hostility from the big upright two-legged creatures we sometimes saw striding along the banks of our pool. As our friends spoke of them with bated breath, and fled at the sound of their voices, so likewise we also quickly learnt to dread these creatures, while having no word in our own language by which to describe them, we adopted the one used by our hairy, furred, and feathered friends, and called them ‘Foes.’ For a considerable time we were under the impression that the male Foes covered up their legs, while the females of the

species only wrapped theirs round with cloth ; this we were led to suppose was the fact by noticing the more brilliant colours, together with the shapelier forms disported by the Foes whose legs were hidden, so we jumped to the conclusion that, like the male of the pheasant, the blackcock, and the grouse, the males of the Foes also carried the brightest plumage with the comeliest figures. Observation, assisted by further discussions with our friends on the bank, eventually taught us our surmise was incorrect, and that amongst the Foes the law which governed the birds and the beasts was exactly reversed.

“ You see, fish start in life under one great disadvantage, for whereas deer, grouse and bunnies have the benefit of parental care and advice, we have to do without either the one or the other, and it is, perhaps, to compensate us for this loss that we are kept so small for so long. Of course, I am not capable of measuring time exactly in the same way as the Foes do, but I can yet

remember that twice I saw the ice and snow 'bree' succeeded by mild weather, while during that time many of our young bird friends had not only reached maturity, but had themselves become parents.

"The next event of any importance in my life was the strange fact that one spring day I began to change colour. The three marks on each of my sides disappeared, and I was soon swimming about in a pretty bright silver coat. The same thing happened to the most of my comrades, while all those that had donned this new garb became possessed with a frantic desire to explore the wonders of the waters lower down the river; so the word was passed round that a down-stream expedition would start on the morrow.

"Accordingly, on the next day, some thousands of us began to swim with the current. As we did so, we soon perceived that all our enemies were still with us; in addition there appeared also two new terrors in the shape of tempting worms and

tiny flies. Now I had at times, when watching from the depths of the river, seen some of the female Foes shudder, shriek, and turn pale at the sight of a worm, but I can nevertheless assert that they are one of the greatest of dainties if they be of the right sort. Many of these worms and flies were, however, possessed of such strength that when we seized them, they retaliated by carrying us ashore. To their fascinations many of my friends fell victims, and I noticed that on all these sad occasions there was invariably a Foe on the bank, until by degrees I learnt to associate their presence with the appearance of these powerful flies and worms, so therefore I and many others, taking counsel together, agreed to look before we leaped, and by so doing I now know for certain that we escaped great danger.

“One day, together with four close friends, I was resting behind a stone, in a pool above Ballater Bridge, when behold, one of the nicest little worms I had ever seen came rolling round the corner

of our shelter. It was quite a new species to me, and was beautifully marked with yellowish red rings, while it looked so tempting, smelt so sweet, and was wriggling so prettily in its efforts to escape, that, forgetting all caution, I made a dash at the enticing mouthful. Truly delicious it tasted, but as I turned to regain my resting-place, the horrid creature began to wrestle with me. In spite of my struggles I was hauled to the surface, only to be sent flying over the head of a small Foe into a grass field. Here I still fought my best to get rid of this demon worm, and while growing fainter at every kick, the small Foe picked me up, and kindly setting me free from the worm, threw me back into the river, the while calling out to a female Foe seated behind him in the grass, 'It's only a horrid little smolt.'

"I lost no time in rejoining my companions, and telling them of my adventure ; we all swore off worms of any description. Many flies, however, were so tempting but so exactly like the real ones

we had just previously swallowed with pleasure and impunity, that great numbers of us fell victims to them, and very few had the good luck to meet with treatment as kind as I had experienced, for not one in a hundred came back to us.

“On our way down stream we fell in with other companies of fish, all equally bent on the same journey, and almost each pool we came to added to our numbers, until at length we were a countless crowd. Presently the rapid rush of the river ceased, and we found ourselves in deep slow-running water, in which, by-and-by, we were brought to a halt by a wall of brown weed, which appeared to stretch right across the river. It was of singularly regular shape, but through it most of us wriggled our way in safety. This remarkable weed had a peculiar but not unpleasant smell, and when working my way past it, I saw many of our large relations hung up in its folds, while in spite of their struggles they were slowly but surely pulled to the shore, where I saw a cluster of Foes stand-

ing by the water-edge, and promptly made a note of the event for future guidance, for it was clear our enemies were again persecuting us in what to me was then a novel manner. Alas, now in my old age I am but too well aware of their fell designs, and how difficult they are to defeat!

“We then entered water as black as night, which smelt and tasted in a most nauseating way, so more by feeling than by sight we hastily continued our downward course, but not without the loss of many lives, as thousands of the weakly ones amongst us succumbed to the effects of the filthy fluid in which we found ourselves. After some time we were once more able to see, and then as we were revived from the dreadful journey by a deliciously stimulating but unknown taste, I recalled to mind what I had heard the great ones of my race saying to each other in the pool of my birth as they talked over this delightful relish while longing to enjoy it once more. Very soon after this the river had gone altogether, and we found

ourselves in very deep, clear, quiet water. Greedily our gills drank in the tonic surrounding us, while our mouths were incessantly busy in satisfying the enormous appetite we all now felt, for one mouthful of this water appeared to contain more food than the river had afforded us in a whole day ; also we gorged ourselves on tiny fish and passed our spare time in leaping, playing and rejoicing in the pellucid depths.

“For some sixty sunsets this life continued, while as we never ceased to eat, we grew big and strong at a great rate. During this time our chief enemies were the gulls and the coal fish, for as long as we were small the seals did not consider us worthy of notice, so we had indeed a happy period, till at last the whole of us were some fifteen times heavier than when we entered these regions of plenty. Then there came to us all an irresistible desire to revisit the scenes of our babyhood. Those amongst us who had been born lower down the river than ourselves declared their intention of delaying their start, and the nearer to the mouth of the river

each company had been born, the later they intended to make their departure. In addition to the wish to roll again in the rapids of the Dee, we were expedited on our way by anxiety to rid ourselves of biting insects that had attached themselves so fast to our bodies as to become immovable, but which we hoped would be washed away by the rush of the streams.

“When the day dawned for our company to start, we made at once for the nearest land. I cannot explain how we knew in which direction to go, but suffice it to say no mistake was made, for after a long swim we reached a rock-bound shore, while in an equally mysterious manner the whole of us knew which way to turn our heads in order to reach our goal. In an extended line we commenced to swim along the coast, till we were pulled up by a wall of weed, which bore to my mind a most suspicious resemblance to the wall we had met in coming down the river. We were now too big to pass through the numberless small

diamond-shaped holes in front of us, so resolving to exercise the greatest caution, I fell back to watch my companions pushing their noses in vain against this barrier. They followed along the wall until I saw many of them crowding into a great square space made of the same curious weed, and mindful of my river experience, I darted back, taking with me as many of my friends as I could alarm. As a crowd of us steered clear of the great square of weed, we noticed a stout pole stood out through the length of the structure, and while passing on we observed many of our numbers having got into the square could not get out again. We therefore stayed our progress to take counsel together as to whether we could in any way assist them, and while so doing a boat containing Foes approached the place where our friends were detained.

“Now as long as the water is deep boats do not frighten us at all, so we watched the proceedings, and on arriving over the top of the square

the Foes pulled at the pole passing through it, when suddenly the whole thing collapsed into a bag, which was quickly drawn into the boat with all our struggling relations inside it. Horrified at the sight, we sadly pushed on for the mouth of the river, but the numbers of these devilish traps that we met on the way was extraordinary, for we had no sooner left one behind us than we were encountered by another. Alas, at each we lost some of our numbers, until when we arrived at Dee mouth but barely one half of our original force remained, while we began to think the Foes of the sea were even worse than those of the river.

“It is not easy to explain how I with so many others escaped, but I have heard the deer say that in every herd of animals, the Foes included, there are ever some who are more lucky or more clever than others, and I suppose under this head must be numbered all those members of our company who now found themselves at the mouth of the Dee. We rejoiced as we felt the fresh water

pouring down on us, for we recognised that the river was running bank high, so eagerly pressing forward we lost no time in dashing as fast as we could through the horrid, thick, black, dirty water I remembered so well, while as we again reached the clear we one and all began to leap and race about for joy.

“On the banks there were great numbers of Foes walking about with their hands in their pockets, and in many places they halted in crowds to watch us while some of them stamped their feet and shook their fists at us as if in a rage at our innocent joy; on the shore there were boats lying empty, and beside them, stretched on rails to dry in the sunshine, were long lengths of the treacherous weed that had trapped so many of our comrades in the sea, which I now know the Foes call nets.

“Surprised at the quiet attitude of the Foes, we began to hope their cruel natures had been changed; but just then we met a big old fish of

twenty pounds, who mentioned that, luckily for us, this was a day the Foes called the Sabbath, and that every seventh day this festival recurred, while during it they agreed to leave all birds, beasts, and fishes unmolested. By the following morning we had become a good deal scattered, as the night had been dark for travelling and the water rushes difficult to ascend, so the strongest had passed on ahead, leaving the weakest a long way behind. This day I found myself with half-a-dozen other tired friends resting beneath a boulder in a deep but rapid stream.

“Now the one drawback to river life is the scarcity of food, for excepting in rainy weather worms rarely come to us, so we have to manage as best we can by eating water shrimps and such like trifles, helped out now and then by a few flies from the surface; therefore, being hungry after my exertions, my eyes were on the watch for something I might devour. Presently there was ever such a little splash in the water a long way to one side of

me; then, lo and behold, I saw coming towards my hiding place a beautiful little insect, the like of which I had never seen before. With quiet, regular strokes it was at last playing about over my head, all unconscious of my presence. It worked its tiny fins, while it glittered and displayed many of the bright colours of the little fish off which we had all fed so plentifully in the sea; so saying to myself, 'Surely it *must* be good—at any rate, I'll try it!' with a sweep of my tail I darted from my lair, and falling below my victim, with sensations of fear mingled with delight, I closed my teeth on the enticing morsel and prepared to rush back to my shelter. As I turned, I found that something checked me, but as there was nothing to pain or otherwise cause alarm, I did not pay much heed to the matter, and glancing upwards I saw there was a long piece of transparent grass hanging to the insect, so thinking this might have caught in a stick or a stone, I shook my head to free it, while as I glanced once more to the bank I observed

an approaching Foe. As he advanced I felt an odd sensation of being in some way connected with him, for each movement he made appeared to be reflected in my own person, so that every step he took towards me lowered me a correspondingly further distance down stream, and then, horror of horrors, it flashed through my mind I was in some way fastened to that detested Foe, even as I had been fastened once before by the tiny fly of the small Foe in the days of my smolthood.

“Therefore, with all the energy of despair, I plied both tail and fins until I had placed a long distance between us. This effort tired me far more than usual, so as the Foe was out of sight, I rested on the bed of the river to recruit. At the same moment I began to experience a peculiar jarring, grating, whirring feeling in my mouth which, as the Foe once more came into view, seemed to throb in unison with the motions of his right hand, as it twirled rapidly round and round.

“I was now in shallow water, so I looked up and

noticed that what I had taken to be a transparent weed was a line of some nearly invisible material, which, leaving the water just above my head, joined on to a thicker one passing over the top of a thin bent wand, and eventually found its way into the hands of the Foe. Realising now most fully what dire peril I was in, I gathered my strength for one desperate dash for freedom, and anxiously I waited till the Foe was opposite me with the point of the wand nearly touching the water over my head; then with all my might and main I suddenly flung myself high out of the stream, while as I fell back something went click! and as I instantaneously knew I was free, with a rattle I made my way up stream to my friends. As I passed the Foe, he was standing looking at the water with a Sabbath expression on his face, while his wand was straight and flashing beautifully in the sunshine.

“On reaching my retreat, I found to my dismay that the horrid insect was still sticking in my mouth, so during the relation of my adventures

my comrades were devising methods to rid me of the nuisance, while they examined it closely. They told me it had a black and yellow body, with two small eyes half way down it; there was a shiny golden streak on its back, while its legs were black and white. The creature did not pain me in the least, but I began to reflect that it would be unpleasant to go about for ever with this oddity in my nose, so by dint of rubbing it against stones, and by pushing it about in all directions, the tormentor was at last got rid of.

"A careful note was made of this insect, so that we might give it a wide berth if any of us met it again, and this done, we rested quietly till the sun's slantendicular rays illumined the depths of the Dee, but unlike the fishes that I once heard a bright-plumaged female Foe describe to a male, instead of crying out, perspiring and using bad language, we splashed about in the heat until we were tired out and glad to rest again. While lying in tranquil enjoyment, we presently noticed another

remarkable insect just over our heads, but it was totally unlike the one that had brought me to such trouble, for it moved with quicker jerks, while it had a beautiful blue body which glittered in the sun; it had also blue legs and no eyes in its back. Nevertheless I regarded it with suspicion, but before I could say a warning word a hungry comrade had seized the brilliant little animal, and as at the same second I saw the nearly invisible string reaching to the Foe on the bank, I realised that my friend would have to face the same danger I had so recently escaped from.

“Hastening to his side, I told him to do exactly as I had done; he took my advice to the letter, but, alas! after making his leap into the air he was still tightly fastened to the Foe. Repeatedly he leapt, but it was all useless, and then I took a look towards the bank, and behold this time it was a female Foe that held the bending wand, while behind her stood a male Foe, whose hands clutched a long stick, at the end of which glittered

a cruel-looking, big, bright metal hook. Over the face of the male Foe there then came the same expression I had so often seen appear as they drank from the small metal cups which so many of them carried in their pockets, while over the face of the female Foe there spread a similar look of content, only we had noticed that this expression in *their* faces was usually produced by something the male Foe had whispered in their ears. Alas for my poor friend, I could but shudder as I saw him dragged from the water by the cruel hook, only to be ruthlessly knocked on the head, while the heartless wicked Foes fell to rejoicing over his body.

“With deliberate design have I used the term insect, although I am now well aware the Foe call these creatures ‘flies.’ Of course to their eyes they may appear to be flies, but certain it is to us salmon they seem to be water insects, for the only resemblance they bear to anything on which we feed in the sea is their glitter, their colour and

their liveliness, by which three things they often remind us of the toothsome shoals of the incessantly quivering fry of the sea fish; moreover, these insects of the Foe seem to be for ever trying to elude pursuit, which fact alone acting on the mind of any strong, healthy, hungry salmon is well calculated to excite the desire to catch and examine the curiosity. Fly, forsooth! It is an insult to our intelligence to imagine the thing a Foe calls a 'Jock Scott' or a 'Blue Doctor' can possibly be mistaken for a fly by even the most giddy or inexperienced of grilse. Neither are we so stupid as to take this so-called fly for a fish; we simply accept it as a water insect that may be good to eat, because we are hungry, and well aware we must not expect to find rich sea food in fresh water. In the words of your poet Milton, we 'take it for a faery vision of some gay creatures of the elements that in the colours of the rainbow live and play!' At times it is the black with yellow body that tempts our appetites, at others the pale blue colour

wins the day for the Foe. Likewise in certain weather and water, especially when it is a big river with a cold atmosphere, we are more readily persuaded to feed by the sight of large insects such as 'The White Eagle' and 'The Gordon,' and at such times I know but too well both these flies can be used against us with deadly effect.

"Once again, however, do these two insects well demonstrate the crass perversity of the Foe in speaking of them as flies, for where in all the wide world is any fly resembling either of them? Nevertheless, we salmon are very fond of feeding on certain natural flies, and thousands and thousands of 'March Browns' have I swallowed with gusto, while, alas! numerous are the friends I have lost by the Foe's all too natural imitation of the same.

"Greatly upset and distressed at the barbarity I had witnessed, I was so terrified that I did not return to my friends, but rushed up-stream, till at last I came to a halt in a very big long pool,

which later on a friendly hind, who came to drink, told me was called 'Waterside,' in the Forest of Glen Tana, and here I found companions of all sizes. Daily, however, the Foes appeared on the banks to throw to us insects of every variety of size and colour. One Foe in particular, tall, thin, copper-coloured, and clad in grass-green plumage, seemed specially able to send his insects further than all the others, and when we saw him coming and fled to the opposite bank, he would yet send his fiendish lures right on to our noses. My friend the old hind told me later this Foe was called 'Boatie' Stevens, who was very proud of being able to send the insects at the end of his line further over the water than any other Foe in all Scotland, and we laughed with astonishment that such trifles could be considered as important by such clever beings as the Foes undoubtedly were. However, for the next forty sunsets we were safe from even him, for of rain there fell none while the water grew small, and the sun shone so brightly

all day, that we could easily detect the thin line with the insect at the end of it, and not a single one of us was victimised.

“After that when the flood-gates of heaven were opened, I continued my upward journey leisurely and only travelling a short distance between sunrise and sunset. Numerous, however, were the insects offered me during this period, but recollecting the cruel scenes I had witnessed, I passed them all unnoticed. It was not so, however, with every one, for, alas! never a day went by but what I saw other more foolish fish try to devour some of these delusions, and again and again the same drama of murderous torture was enacted by rejoicing Foes.

“Then there came one special day when every pool through which I travelled had one or two of the Foes on the banks, while all that day the river was full of their treacherous insects; then, strange to say, on the day following there was not a Foe or an insect to be seen, and as they did not again appear, it seemed as if our existence was

suddenly forgotten, for from that time forward every day was a Sabbath to us. In uneventful quietude I worked my way up-stream to another fine pool, which an old crow, who was poking about on the shore for food, told me was called 'Tassack,' of Cambus o' May. Here I was destined to experience some totally new sensations, for as I swam into 'Tassack' I was joined by a slender grilse girl with a beautifully small head and tail, and whom I had formerly met in the deep sea.

"What charm there was about her I could not tell, but certain it was that from the moment of meeting I never left her side and could not bear to lose sight of her, while altogether there seemed to be a greater pleasure in life than I ever dreamt of. Now that I am old, I doubt if I did not over-rate these joys, for what with the life she led me by pretending to go off with others, and what with almost daily tough battles with rivals, I now see that the period could not have been absolutely so full of delight as my fancy then pictured.

However, this is only by the way, and an old fifty-four-pounder is entitled to a sneer at the pleasures of his grilsehood. Suffice it to say that we were duly married, the afore-mentioned old crow kindly cawing the service, while our honeymoon was passed in perfect happiness on a shallow, secluded bank of gravel.

“The frost and snow came and went, and then when we were discussing plans for another trip to the sea, for a change of water and food, all my enjoyment was scattered to the winds, for one night, when the water was big and dirty, a fiend in the shape of an otter snatched my bride from under my nose, while next morning I had the misery of seeing her lying dead on the bank with a great hole eaten out of her beautiful shoulders. Oh! how I rejoiced a few days later, and with what pleasure I saw the detested and dreaded otter struggling in the jaws of something which held him tightly fastened to the bank, and then while I feasted my eyes on his discomfort, my revenge was

perfected by watching a Foe come along the side of the river, and, killing the fiend with his stick, he threw him contemptuously into a large brown bag.

“With cheeks marked with orange stripes; with sides clad in dull, blackish mourning, I then in solitude began to drop tail first slowly down stream, only making progress when I felt there was sufficient water to take me in safety, for now the Foe was once again tempting us with his glittering insects.

“Hungry as I often was, all temptations were resisted, while several times each day there came great crowds of ‘March Browns’ floating down the stream, off which I with many others made fairly good repasts. I became, however, so accustomed to see some of my brethren seize the insects of the Foe that, instead of pitying them, I began to laugh at their stupidity, the while I flattered myself on my own cleverness. In this case, as is usual, pride met with its due reward, for a little later, when resting quietly, there came a most lovely fat

minnow dancing across the stream, and trying all it could to escape from me ; in a second I had closed my mouth over it, but only to find once more that the artful Foe had anticipated my tastes, and that I was held fast by many pricking points. I fought my best, but tried in vain every trick former experience had taught, and at last, utterly exhausted, the Foe drew me to a sandbank, and, stepping to where I lay gasping, lifted me by the tail, while saying to a companion, 'Only another brute of a kelt.' Then, placing me on the sand, he held me so tightly as to prevent all struggling, while with a knife he cut the minnow from my mouth, so thinking that my last hour had come, I fainted, as much from exhaustion as from fright.

"When I came to my senses the Foe was holding me in the stream by the tail, while as he covered and uncovered my gills with water by pushing me gently backwards and forwards, with spasmodic gasps I slowly began to revive. When I was again fairly strong, to my great astonishment

he pushed me into the stream, where seeking deep water with all possible speed, I quickly lost sight of him.

“Some days were here passed in recruiting from the terrifying exertions of this adventure, and then, resuming the downward journey, I witnessed many other fish hauled ashore by both insect and minnow, the Foe often piercing them through with the cruel fork and flinging them back to the water to take their chance of life; and as but few of these poor wounded ones recovered I congratulated myself at having escaped similar harsh treatment.

“I now began to meet, day by day, great numbers of sick friends; it mattered not whether they were coming up stream or going down, but almost every other one was attacked by a plague, though what caused it was a mystery to us all. The sickness showed itself by producing great white blotches on our bodies, which by degrees spread all over us, till some amongst us eventually became nearly as white as snow. A large patch of this misery

appeared on my back, which produced such irritation, depression, and weakness that I began to fear of reaching the salt water.

“ Hundreds and hundreds of other sick ones crossed my path, while on the banks many Foes walked to and fro with Sabbath faces, as with sharp hooks at the end of long poles they pulled the plague-stricken ones out of the water, and, after killing them, put their bodies in deep holes in the ground.

“ While resting in the Aboyne Bridge pool a friendly fellow of some thirty pounds took compassion on my youth and offered to be my companion to the sea, and, as this was his fifth descent of the river, many perilous adventures with hairbreadth escapes did he relate. From him I quickly gained much useful knowledge, even learning the titles of some of the Foes and the names of many parts of the river. The next morning we saw two of our enemies stop on their way over the bridge to peer into the depths below, but this was such an

ordinary occurrence that neither of us had previously paid any special attention to the matter. These two Foes were big and striking-looking specimens, while the moment my companion saw them I noticed his sides turned a shade blacker, the red streaks on his cheeks deepened in colour, and the great hook at the end of his lower jaw shook with evident terror. Giving me a nudge, he whispered—

“‘It is time for us to be off, youngster, for those two Foes looking down on us are perhaps the most terribly persistent of all our enemies; year by year they return to destroy us, so now take a good look at them. The heaviest goes by the name of Digby Cayley, and the other is just one George Whitehead; so if ever you see either of these, or any others of the Foes I will presently point out, then, as you value your life, keep your mouth shut and make a fast day. Ugh! to my shame be it spoken, I must admit both of yon devils have had me by the tail as a kelt.’

“At the end of this speech we at once com-

menced to drop down stream, passing Ballogie, Woodend, Cairnton, Blackhall, and Inchmarlo, all of which are favourite haunts of the Foe, for on account of the numerous deep holding pools in that part of the river, many of our sea-comers were tempted to rest some time ere facing the rush of the rapids above, and this massing of our numbers ever gave the Foe a better chance of using their lures. On the way down my counsellor pointed out to me 'Muster' Drummond, standing on the Bridge of Potarch, Tom Farley, and David Rae were by the side of 'Ferracht,' and 'Muster' Hay with Frank Farquharson stood at the 'Big Gurnell,' so with nervous gasps my friend bubbled into my ear a warning to give all these Foes a very wide berth.

"Quitting this part of the river, we dropped quickly down through Crathes, Park, Durris and Drum, till the water widened to flow more quietly, and here appeared great numbers of the Foe on the banks and bridges, some of whom pelted us

with stones, which we did not mind, as they could be seen falling, and thus easily avoided. Then presently we observed a boat crossing the stream above us; it was propelled at a great pace by four Foes, while a fifth stood at the end to pass long lengths of net into the river; heartily we congratulated each other on being clear of this danger, when, to our dismay, the boat was pulled swiftly round below us and back again to the bank it came from, while that terrible wall of net had surrounded us. Nearer and nearer it closed in, till presently the harsh thing was clinging round my body as it tore off my scales, and in a short time some hundred of us were all splashing in a few inches of water.

“Taking a last look at my native element, I vowed by all that was fishy, if I escaped this peril alive, that never again would I enter a river. We lay all huddled up in one gasping, struggling heap, while the Foes rushed towards us to cruelly seize and kill all salmon that had recently left the sea.

Then in a body they rolled us that were left out of the net on to the shore, whereupon one of the Foe came to look us over and then cried out, 'Send the rest of these lanky beggars on their journey!' At this order the Foes began to kick us to the river with their hard boots, and all those of our party who were able to swim after such rough treatment dashed on towards the sea. As for myself, though badly bruised, I was not seriously hurt, for luckily for me a Foe had tried to kick three of us into the river at once, and as I was furthest from him, it was the other two of my friends who had been the chief sufferers, while the one nearest to the Foe died of his injuries. A few days in the salt water not only made us quite well again, but also completely cured the plague spots.

"Since those days I have devoted much trouble to acquiring fuller information about the Foes and their wicked ways, and I now flatter myself I know as much about them and their devices as they know about me. The great problem I had set

myself to solve was as to how we might avoid the perils besetting us in sea and river. It must be borne in mind that I had been caught as a smolt by a small fly, as a grilse by an insect, as a kelt by a minnow, and then by a net, and though my luck had been great in escaping each of these perils, the miserable fate of such multitudes of my friends had left me with an implacable feeling of resentment against the Foe.

"Immersed then in twenty fathoms of deep sea thought, I waited till the time came when many of us wanted to return to the joys of the river. Following in the rear of the first expedition that started, I soon saw the usual walls of netting standing out from the sea-shore, only they seemed to be even more numerous than in the past year, while a cursory inspection of these engines of destruction drove me back to the depths. There I met many others who had also made the river journey, and survived to tell the tale, and by degrees we formed our plans. As every few weeks

lapsed, I sent off a scout to the sea-shore with instructions to observe if the dreaded nets were still there, till at length one day our messenger returned with the good news of their disappearance. This scouting I had been induced to do by something I had overheard three seals say to each other. They had been lying on a rock basking in the sun, and had spoken very confidently of a time coming when all the nets in sea and river would vanish for a period. Ugh! then those horrid monsters discussed with much gusto an anticipated banquet of salmon!

“On communicating this news of the vanishing of the nets to my friends, I was unanimously elected leader of our band; so, calling them together, we started off for Dee mouth, and, entering without molestation, we broke up into small parties in the lower reaches of the river, where the males of our company speedily took unto themselves wives, and enjoyed ourselves after the manner of our race.

“Thus far, my schemes had been highly success-

ful, but my great anxiety now was to discover when the Foe would resume their persecution, for the fact of meeting fish coming up out of the sea warned me it would not be long delayed. As leader of the company, I had forbidden any member to ascend the river higher than myself, so, on passing the word round in the pool I was in, we all assembled and began to drop down stream. At each pool we came to we picked up others of our band, and as we swam past the netting-stations we saw it was high time, for the boats with the nets were being got ready; thus, unmolested, and with every salmon want satisfied, we all once more reached salt water, and in this manner a yearly increasing body of fish contrive to avoid the snares and allurements of the Foe.

“It is nearly needless to state the grilse boys and girls scoffed at our theories; go their own way they would, and most of them paid for their frolic with their lives. As every season, however, fresh members join our company, we hope thus to meet

the war of extermination carried on against us by the Foe.

“Occasionally it happened that relations who had lost their way from the Don, the Deveron, the Spey, the North and South Esk, the Tay, and the Earn, would unexpectedly appear in our midst, and from these we heard doleful tales; for on each of these rivers the netting was reported to be so close and so easy as to make it nearly impossible for even a grilse to pass.

“I now know that the short truces granted us on the Sabbaths, with the longer ones allowed us late in the season, are but given to prevent the extinction of our race. So strong, however, is the feeling of the Foe against us, and so great is his greed to eat us or sell us, that the well-disposed of the Foe are compelled to employ many stout guardians to protect us during these close times, and, knowing all that I now do, it is certain no fish is so mercilessly or so incessantly persecuted as we poor salmon. Each day we pass in fresh water we are in

danger from poachers, who use spears, gaffs, 'spurge' or poison, dynamite, and nets, that are not lawful; then, when what the Foe calls the close time comes to an end, nets innumerable try to take us both in fresh and salt water, the while the prowling Foe on the bank never ceases to tempt us with his insects, minnows, prawns, and worms.

"All praise, therefore, be to the water gods who inspired me to devise a plan for ensuring a somewhat more certain and peaceful life to all those good salmon who joined in my scheme. Amongst us the seal, the otter, and the poachers are now the only enemies to be dreaded, while it is but little to our credit that the attacks of the two first-named scourges are so often successful. That good fortune, however, which had guarded me through so many perils did not desert me in this matter, and though at times chased sorely hard, and though wounded by the teeth of both these enemies, I am yet swimming about in health and safety. As for the poachers, they troubled us but seldom, for as

the rules of our company forbade us to proceed very far above the good city of Aberdeen, and as the fish-stealer liketh not publicity or the proximity of those of the Foe who dress themselves in dark blue, he was perforce driven to seek more secluded spots for the carrying out of his illegal designs.

“After comparing notes with many friends dwelling in the Don, the Deveron, the Spey, and the North Esk, I am, indeed well satisfied at having been born a Dee fish ; not that I would sing its praises as quite a perfect salmon Paradise, but it is much nearer that way than any of the other named rivers. As to the realisation of a true salmon elysium, I have ceased to dream of such a joy, for I recognise that as long as the Foe lives, so long are we destined, year by year, to pay him a tribute of thousands and thousands of salmon lives.

“To the inevitable we are prepared to submit with the best grace we can, and I have been led into bubbling forth this long rigmarole, not from any wish to plead on behalf of our race for

a wholly unmolested life, but solely with a view to urge the Foe to be merciful and not pursue us to total extermination. Surely since they set such store by us, it must be for their own interests to preserve us, and to this end on every river they should associate together to try to do away with all nets plying in fresh water, and they should also *insist* that a longer weekly close time be given to us, while as for the stake nets in the sea, at least every other one should be abolished.

“And now, if you will mention all these matters to your Foe friends, I shall feel I have not sent up all these air bubbles for nothing. The garrulity of old age must be my excuse, and so in the hopes of yet living to reach the weight of three-score pounds and ten, which is the limit of salmon growth, and trusting when that time arrives I may not find myself fastened to you by any devilish insect, for by your face I can see you are longing for such an event, I wish you, sir, a polite good-bye.”

To make a start, however, with this chapter, already so long delayed by the narration of the memoirs of my loquacious friend, the fifty-four pounder.

In 1836, Yarrell wrote in his "Book of Fishes," "In no country in proportion to its size are salmon fisheries so extensive or so valuable as in the United Kingdom."

Now that was penned nearly fifty years ago, and since then the numbers of the nets have enormously increased, although the actual fishing grounds have remained the same, while the only set-off against the amplification and the improved methods of working has been the opening up of fresh breeding grounds and the establishment of various fish hatcheries, and, as will be seen, neither of these measures has been able to counterbalance the exigencies of the altered conditions of netting and angling.

For some years the salmon held their own in face of the annually rising demands made on them, and both upper and lower proprietors had but

little to grumble at; then as the enjoyment to be got out of salmon angling became more widely appreciated, and the access to Scotch rivers was made more easy, so by degrees arose an ever-growing demand for angling waters, and the upper proprietors of rivers whose fishings formerly let for small sums began to wake up to the fact that the angling tenancies could be made to play an important part in the value of their rent rolls.

This season four friends of mine paid £1,000 for the fishing of a well-known stretch of water for rather less than three months of the spring. In 1836 the angling on the same water could have been had for one hundred pounds, and, indeed, it may be doubted if it would have fetched so much.

To quote one more case of quite recent date, the salmon fishing on the Lower Test ten years ago was let for fifty pounds, but it now realises one thousand pounds, and similar instances could be indefinitely multiplied. When, therefore, the closely scientific netting in both sea and river,

in conjunction with the vast augmentation in the number of netting stations, began at length to tell upon the multitudes of the salmon, the upper proprietors naturally commenced to cry out at the few fish that found their way to them, for this meant a loss of rental, as it was self-evident the high prices paid by anglers would not be given if sport fell off each year.

Now certainly the upper proprietors appear to be entitled to have plenty of fresh-run fish in their fisheries from the very day the nets begin to work, for first and foremost they own the whole of the salmon breeding grounds, and, during their stay in the river, they protect them from poachers; also they throw their ægis over the whole mass of the baby salmon. It is true in some rivers the upper proprietors are helped in this work of protection by the lower ones, while in other cases certain of the Fishery Associations provide water bailiffs to assist the keepers of the upper proprietors in their good work.

Many river owners have also been spirited enough to start fish hatcheries at their own expense, and with the view of increasing the size of the fish, eggs have been imported from the Rhine, the Shannon, the Tay, and the Deveron, as each of these rivers is celebrated for its large fish. Amongst those who have thus acted may be mentioned the Earl of Mansfield, the Marquis of Breadalbane, Sir William Cunliffe Brooks, and Sir James Gibson Maitland, this last-named gentleman being an absolute enthusiast in the matter who probably knows more about salmon-breeding than anyone in the Kingdom. Altogether there are but few big rivers without a salmon hatchery, but, nevertheless, there are those who shake their heads at them and assert they do but little good in comparison with the number of fry they yearly turn into the river; they are convinced that hatched fry differ from river-reared fry, and that when turned into the river "tame" fry do not know how to conceal themselves from their foes,

or how to find food, and altogether lack the strength of naturally-hatched fry; also I have heard it stated that hatched fry should be turned into the river as far away from the mouth as may be, for that if they are placed in fresh water too low down on the river and before they are acclimatised, they will on going to the sea wander off to other rivers to ascend them instead of returning to the one they started from. These theories are mentioned for what they are worth, for up to date none of them have been substantiated as facts.

The upper proprietors then, having done their utmost to preserve alike the old and the young of the salmon, find when springtime brings back the fish at their very best, that the lower proprietors are capturing with their nets almost every one that enters the river. It is perhaps fortunate for me that I am not an upper proprietor on a Scotch salmon stream, for the chances are I should have passed through the vexations of many

law-suits, and probably have spent more than the value of such a property in trying to assert my rights to have a share of the fish protected and reared in my river at my expense, for to me the whole thing appears much the same as if a sheep farmer demanded from some other farmer with more suitable ground that he should rear and graze his lambs for nothing.

Presently, however, the lower proprietors themselves began to feel the attacks of the increasing numbers of sea nets, for a steady loss of rental began to overtake them. In self-defence they started fresh netting stations and worked harder, but their efforts have been nearly useless, for during the past forty years the netting stations in the estuaries and low down on the rivers have alike experienced a continuous falling off in rentals, and it is a fact, for which I have the authority of the owner, that one of the best stations on the Tay, which let in 1854 for £1725, was let in 1894 for £972, or a decrease of £753.

It is equally a fact that in the eleven years from 1834 to 1844, the Scotch salmon fisheries yielded an average of 29,000 boxes of fish of 150 lbs. each, while from 1879 to 1889 the average was but 24,000 boxes, and the total decrease in the last eleven years, as compared with the earlier mentioned eleven years, is no less than 3,683 *tons* of fish, and estimating them as weighing ten pounds each, there is a loss of 825,000 salmon. Here, then, is incontrovertible proof of the slow but certain deterioration of our salmon supply, while I feel very confident that from 1894 to 1904 there will be a still heavier falling off.

The laws which at present regulate the salmon fisheries are practically the same as those made in 1861, or thirty-three years ago, but the multiplication of sea and river nets during the last twenty years, with the improved methods of working, together with the great increase in the numbers of anglers, have never been taken into consideration or legislated for.

Thirty years ago it was common enough to get real good spring angling on the Spey, while fair early sport was also to be had on the Deveron, the North and South Esk, the Don, and the Earn; but in the present day so close is the netting that it has become quite a rare event to kill a spring fish with a rod in any of the five last-named rivers, and, as a matter of fact, no attempt is ever made to let the spring fishing on any of them. As soon, however, as the nets are removed in August, the fisheries on each of these rivers bring in high rentals and yield splendid sport. It is certain such a state of affairs is a direct interference with the laws of nature, and, as a consequence, the netting has at length commenced to deteriorate in each of these rivers.

Although autumn fish yield good sport, yet they are not to be compared for eating purposes with those of the spring; but anglers who pay heavy rents for autumn fishing are often loth to admit this, and while *those who catch them* say the "spring polish" is only just vanishing, those who merely

see them laid out on the bank often turn away muttering, "Black as niggers, or red as foxes." Of course, there are some bright autumn fish, but they do not average one in four, and even the most silvery and the best are insipidly flavourless as compared with a springer.

There are people who assert that only spring fish breed spring fish, and if this has any foundation in fact, then the falling off in the netting returns of the Spey and other rivers alluded to can be easily accounted for. To my mind it appears unlikely there should be any difference between the fry of spring or autumn fish, but the ova of these latter are ever in much greater danger of being swept away by violent floods, and, therefore, in any series of years in which these take place, it may well be that the whole of the ova in the lower waters is destroyed for several years in succession, and then, in consequence of the very few spring fish that are permitted to ascend the river, the stock must become nearly exterminated.

The ova of spring fish are not so exposed to danger, for high up in the rivers and in their tributaries a flood has nothing like the force of the resistless torrent formed below by the accumulation of many waters.

It is to be regretted numerous observant anglers permit themselves to preface most of their favourite theories, or hobbies, by saying, "I am perfectly certain," for on the matter of salmon-lore surmises, suggestions, and theories are more numerous than facts, and thus it is I have met with those who are "perfectly certain" it would be better if all kelts were killed, the "certainty" in this case being that the kelts devour such quantities of trout, par and smolts as to render their preservation undesirable, while they are also looked upon as the source of all disease.

Now the evidence that kelts do systematically eat small fish is of the very weakest description, for though I have heard the same so often stated as at one time to believe it myself, yet I have never

been able to come across any keeper or river watcher who could say he had detected them in the act, for at the time they are supposed to devour all these little fish the kelts are usually lying in shallow waters, in which they could not pursue their prey in the same manner as a pike does, without at once being observed. That they will take a spinning par or trout at odd times is no proof that they pass the whole of the days of their kelthood in devouring them. A fresh-run salmon will be quite as likely to seize such a lure, for there is no doubt that salmon of all kinds will frequently swallow any small fish incautiously placing itself over their very noses. Therefore, the evidence we possess on the question of the voracity of the kelts is rather more in their favour than against them. Also, the laws of nature have clearly ordained that the kelts should live to make many journeys to and from the sea during their lifetime, and under such circumstances I feel somewhat confident in advocating their protection. The accu-

sation of devouring great numbers of smolts can hardly be laid to their charge, for, as a rule, there are no smolts till the end of April or beginning of May, and by that time the bulk of the kelts will have gone to the sea, and only an April drought would force them to remain in fresh water. Even, however, supposing the accusers of the kelt to be perfectly in the right, I am yet of the opinion they should be strictly preserved, and to that end I have for many years advocated they should be free of the gaff.

This very season I was well pleased to learn the Marquis of Huntly had sent out a circular to Dee-side anglers, asking them to refrain from gaffing the kelts, and the appeal is one that should commend itself to all good fishermen, not only on the banks of the Dee, but on every other river where rods are plied in the spring. To gaff the kelts is the custom in many places, but doubtlessly anglers have come to be so habituated to the practice as unthinkingly to lend themselves to the

perpetration of a cruelty with a waste of salmon life. In this matter, the law of the land is a most half-hearted piece of legislation, which badly requires altering. At present, any one found in possession of a kelt may be fined five pounds, which penalty was, no doubt, directed against poachers, and the traffic in and export of foul fish. The law having thus emphatically recognised the usefulness of the kelt, yet allows them to be destroyed in great numbers by the gaff, and so long as the maimed or mortally wounded fish is cast back to the river, it is quite content. Therefore, an angler may fearlessly kill hundreds of kelts as long as he does not keep them, but if a poacher, or a shepherd, on the banks of the same river, has but one in his possession, whether for sale or for food, he is fined five pounds.

The total waste of salmon life caused by the gaff is something very large. For instance, on the Dee, in 1891, fully two thousand clean fish were taken by the rods up to the end of April, and it may

be accepted for certain that two kelts were landed for every "right" one, while my own personal experience has been in the proportion of at least three to one; therefore, in the period I have named, some four thousand kelts were brought to bank on Dee-side, and if even only one thousand of these were killed in the gaffing, it would be far too large a yearly tribute to cold steel. Personally, I don't think it is every other fish that survives being gaffed, for I remember, some ten years ago, fishing the Crathes water on the Dee in the spring, and the anglers on some of the waters above me made a practice of gaffing every kelt they landed, which filled the pools I was fishing with dead and dying kelts, the most of which I took out, to satisfy myself they had died from gaff wounds. My fish-book of that season, 1884, states I took out nearly three hundred kelts with but thirty-five clean fish in three months, which gives an average of seven or eight foul fish for each fresh-run one; but this was an exceptionally heavy take of kelts.

There are but few anglers who would grumble if a fine were imposed on gaffing a kelt. This would be a better plan than forbidding the carrying of a gaff until after a certain date, which is now done on a few rivers. The salmon landing-net is so large that its portage entails the necessity of an attendant to carry it; also as there are numbers of anglers who delight in going out alone to do for themselves, as well as many more who cannot afford the luxury of a gillie, I would simply make it a finable offence to put cold steel into a kelt, and then leave each angler to his own devices.

I am credibly informed that kelt sells at sixpence a pound in Aberdeen, so any fine imposed should be sufficiently heavy to forbid the making of a profit on the capture of a kelt. How people can be found to purchase kelt passes my comprehension, for, out of curiosity, I once had the middle slice from a large well "mended" one boiled, but anything more horrid, tasteless, blankety, and nauseating I cannot imagine.

This particular fish was so well mended that my gillie, judging it clean, gaffed it in deep water before I had even seen it. As it was struck through a vital part, I yielded to his entreaties for permission to keep it for a Sunday dinner for his family, and so it came about that the fish was knocked on the head and hidden, to be fetched home in the dark.

My gillie warmly assured me that, if I would try a piece, I should be unable to detect any difference between foul or fresh-run salmon; but, as will be gathered from the above remarks, the result did not come up to his expectations.

It may here, perhaps, be as well to define an unclean salmon. In the close time all salmon, of any sort, are dubbed unseasonable, and it is only when the close time terminates that fish are divided into clean or unclean. During the time the rod may be plied any unspawned fish may legally be taken—a “baggit,” or hen-fish, heavy with roe; a kipper, or cock-fish, full of milt, with a hook at the end of his nose, may both be captured, although

should the roe or the milt break from either in the act of landing, it at once renders them unclean, and I have seen several cases of this touch-and-go nature. No salmon that has spawned may legally be taken out of the water at any time in the year, unless it is a diseased fish covered with fungus. With regard to this disease, there is but little known about it, beyond the fact that if any infected fish reaches the salt water he or she is usually cured.

Most rivers have suffered from it, but those on the east coast more severely than those on the west. What a terrible scourge it is may be estimated when from the Tweed alone, in one year, nearly ten thousand diseased fish were removed and buried. The fact that this epidemic has been at its worst on the east coast appears to lend importance to the surmise that lime together with artificial manure and factory pollution have a great deal to answer for, the latter, perhaps, being the chief culprit. On the west coast there are but few factories, while as the greater number of the rivers

flow through heather land, there is but little artificial manure to be washed into them by floods.

The Tweed itself, where the ravages of the disease have been most severe, is a river swarming with all sorts of factories on its banks, and the town of Galashiels in itself holds enough of them to poison all the fish in all the rivers in Scotland. On the Spey the numerous whiskey distilleries daily send their poisonous refuse into the river, a few drops of which mixed with water will speedily kill any smolts or par placed in it; this then being the case, I cannot but think, if some spirited proprietor would put into force Lord Cross's Pollution Bill of 1893, that the distillers could be compelled to discharge their refuse elsewhere, even though at some expense to themselves; but as long as no one moves in the matter, the injury to the river appears likely to be continued. The Spey has already the honour of being the largest river in Scotland, but likewise it has the disgrace of being the worst spring angling river

on the east coast; also the drainage of the lands of the adjacent farms is more perfect than on most rivers, and thus the rainfall, which some years ago required two or three weeks to gradually discharge itself into the river, is now exhausted in as many days.

That fish return to the rivers they were born in has been proved times without number, but there seems to be no rule as to their rate of increase in weight; some grow very rapidly, and others very slowly.

In February, 1893, a kelt was caught by the rod in the Hampshire Avon; it weighed sixteen pounds, was labelled, and retaken in the nets at Christchurch just one year later, weighing thirty-three pounds, but this appears to be an unusually rapid, but not phenomenal increase.

There is also the oft-quoted instance of the late Duke of Athol, who, in 1845, caught a kelt of ten pounds in the Tay, and labelled it with a zinc label, No. 129, and five weeks and three days

later the fish, with the zinc still attached to it, was taken in the sea nets at Pitfour, weighing twenty-one and a quarter pounds, which was even a greater rate of increase than the Avon fish.

Marked fish have also been captured in the sea, five hundred miles away from the mouth of the river they had left. It seems to me, fish should be more often marked than they are, and to this end I would suggest to Messrs. Farlow, Messrs. Hardy, and the other leading tackle-makers that they should keep a stock of labels ready for attaching to fish, so that anglers could procure them easily; then, if every one that went fishing in the spring would spare a minute or two to marking all the kelts they landed, we should each year have thousands of marked fish to deal with, which would tend to throw further light on their movements.

A kelt can be easily weighed without harming it if the angler keep in readiness a piece of stout cord with a loop at each end, then, by passing

the cord round the tail of the kelt, and one loop through the other, a pull will draw it tight, and the steelyard can be inserted into the free loop to weigh the fish without harm to it, which can then be returned to the water with the label attached to the adipose fin, while all particulars should be entered in a note-book. Much I regret not having done this in years gone by, but I did not think of it, although had I commenced to do this ten years ago, I could easily have marked a thousand kelts.

As to the age of salmon, there is but little known that is certain. Some say the par remains as such but one year before it becomes a smolt; others state it takes two years to arrive at that result; while again there are those who declare three years elapse; but this is a matter the fish hatcheries should surely be able to determine, and probably in different rivers the period of parhood varies. While discussing par it may be as well to mention that the samlet or par never has any colour on the

tip of the adipose fin, whereas both sea trout and trout have an orange, red, or pink tip to it, and this is an infallible method of distinguishing par from other small fish.

Scientific people also state that by the aid of the microscope a fish's age may be exactly determined, for under a strong magnifying power the scales of all fishes may be seen to be formed in rings, just as a tree is formed, and that each ring denotes a year.

Scientists likewise assure us fish have ears; but, for all that, it is doubtful if they can hear sounds not sufficiently loud to produce vibration in the water. I have often tried to move kelts lying in a few feet of water both by shouting or hand-clapping, but no noise produced by these methods had any effect, although a foot stamp on the bank frequently caused a bolt.

There are still many believers in the theory of salmon not feeding in fresh water, but equally there are numbers who hold the opposite opinion.

Those who favour the total abstinence idea maintain the fish live on their own fat in conjunction with the animalculæ of the water; they point to the invariably empty stomach, and maintain a fish only rises at a fly, rushes at minnow or prawn, or deliberately pouches a bunch of worms out of sheer cussedness.

The believers in the feeding doctrine direct attention to the fact that many salmon enter the rivers in February and March to remain a whole year before returning to the sea, and the improbability—nay, almost impossibility—of such a lengthy fast is strongly insisted on, for it certainly is difficult to believe so large a fish could go for so long on so little. As par or as smolts it is not contended they do not feed in fresh water, and therefore it seems but natural they should resume the habits of their youth when they return from the sea. The probabilities are they are not hearty feeders in fresh water, but although I can understand the feeling that might tempt a fish to rise

at a fly, or rush at a spinning bait, or a prawn working about close to its mouth, I cannot imagine how such a feeling could be brought into play by a lump of lob worms rolling down the stream.

I well remember the first time I ever used a worm I lost the fish by striking too soon. On the next occasion it received so much time that on landing it I had to cut him open, while my hook was right in the stomach with but a very small fragment of the bunch of worms remaining; thus then and there I came to the conclusion that if this was not feeding, it was at any rate a very good imitation of it.

As to nothing ever being found in their stomachs, it is easily accounted for by their power of ejecting the contents on the first suspicion of danger. I cannot but think that if a pool full of salmon were to be dynamited by a charge powerful enough to kill all the fish instantaneously, that then many salmon-stomachs would be found to hold food. At sea they have frequently been captured with herring

fry in them, and have also been seen to eject the fry into the nets ; also they have been caught by bits of herring on deep-sea lines, while in a Norway river several were landed full of caterpillars, so taking one thing with another, the balance of probabilities points to the conclusion they do feed in fresh water. There are many people who doubt whether every salmon escaping the nets in the spring really does stay in fresh water for nearly twelve months, and certainly there is a good deal in the theory that after passing a period in the river they try to drop back again to the sea, returning to spawn later on. It is a remarkable thing in a well-stocked river to watch how each flood brings fresh fish into a pool, while each succeeding one takes them away to replace them by others. Those that vanish are supposed to pass up stream, but if they all did, then by the time October came the upper waters would be literally crawling with fish, but that does not happen, and it is likely enough a certain number

of early-running fish do try to drop back into the salt water.

The men at the nets tell me there is usually a run of fish at the first or third quarters of the moon, and if this is right, then the chances are fully four to one against the run taking place during the thirty-six hours of the close time; while furthermore it must be remembered that unless the fish find the river flowing big enough to take them up, even the hitting of the mouth exactly on the close day will be of no avail.

During the past three years there is hardly a salmon river in Scotland that has not shown a decreasing yield both to nets and rods; especially are there four dismal records brought to our notice as sad examples of what other rivers may eventually sink to. In Ireland, the Blackwater and the Laune have been nearly fishless, while in Scotland the Tweed and the Spey have been quite as bad. Now it is incontestable that the only certain way of increasing the stock of salmon is the drastic one

of lengthening the weekly close time for the river nets and limiting the number of the sea nets. With regard to the river close time, another twenty-four hours should be added to the present thirty-six; it should commence on Friday evening at six o'clock, and last till six o'clock on the following Monday morning.

An increase, however, of but twelve hours would do wonders if properly seen to and fairly distributed; for in my humble opinion a close time terminating at six o'clock on Monday morning for the nets at the mouth of a big river ought not to end at the same hour for nets that are twenty miles higher up the water; nets working four miles above the river mouth should not be permitted to ply till ten o'clock on Monday morning, or four hours after those at the mouth have started; while again those nets sweeping the river from four to eight miles still higher up should not be allowed to commence work till two o'clock, and so on all the way up the river, and allowing a delay of four

hours for every four miles until the highest situate nets of all were reached ; by this means those up-river nets would each have to undergo a close time nearly equal in duration to the nets at the mouth.

As these high-up nets are at present worked, there is practically no close time for them whatever, for fish entering the river at six o'clock on Saturday evening are still below the top nets at six o'clock on Monday morning. Surely the fish are entitled to have the same chance of avoiding these upper nets as they have of escaping those at the river mouth, while certainly it may fairly be presumed the originators of the Close Time Laws contemplated as much.

Take, for instance, a most favourable case for the salmon, and let us suppose a "company" of them to arrive off Dundee shortly after six o'clock on Saturday evening ; also we will imagine a nice "fresh" coming down the Tay. Now from Dundee to the top nets at the Linn of Campsie is fully thirty miles, a far greater distance than heavy

spring fish will journey in thirty-six hours, so thus, though they escape the Estuary nets together with the lower ones of the river, they will not have passed the limit point of the upper nets before they are at work again at six o'clock on Monday morning, and then if things are well managed, nearly the whole of our "company" will be hauled ashore. Hence I maintain and think it has been clearly shown these upper nets have practically no close time at all, which is so well known to their owners that many of those placed high up on a river are only worked on Mondays and Tuesdays, as being the only days when there is any chance of getting fish.

A close time of twenty-four hours would, however, be far better than one of twelve, and that granted, then let all nets begin at the same time; it is quite certain that though such an alteration in the present laws might at first cause the netters some small temporary loss, this would speedily be regained and eventually handsomely recouped, for

as soon as the laws of nature had had time to develop themselves on the increased stock of breeding fish, more would be netted in the five days than are now meshed in the six.

Such legislation would, moreover, not only largely increase the existing angling rentals, but would also greatly augment the extent of the angling waters, for rivers like the Findhorn, the Deveron, the Spey, the Ugie, the Ythan, the Don, the two Esks, the Teith, the Forth and the Tweed would each and all once again become good spring rivers for the fisherman. Also the upper proprietors of these streams would be more inclined to follow the example set by those on Deeside, who by their united exertions have made that river yield the finest angling in the kingdom.

In the season of 1891 no less than seven thousand salmon and grilse were captured by the rods, while rather more than one half of this magnificent take were spring fish. In that year a friend of mine rented the Lower Dess water on the Dee at Kin-

cardine O'Neil; it was but half a mile in length and consisted of three pools only. Starting on the 11th of February, on the 20th of April he landed his hundredth clean fish. That very same year I was fishing on the Spey, and up to the same date on *twenty-five miles* of the cream of both banks, which were well and hard fished, there were not as many salmon taken as my friend got on his half mile of the Dee! Yet if the Spey had but the same treatment given to it, I am absolutely convinced in a few years it would excel the Dee and take the rank it should do, and shine forth both for net or rod as the premier river of Scotland.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME REMARKS ON THE FOREGOING CHAPTERS.

THE history of the Monnielack Shootings illustrates the dangers besetting the sportsman who "takes a gun" without making sufficiently close enquiry in all possible directions from which information could be gained. In the Monnielack case, however, the lessor was a gentleman who had no wish to make a profit out of the lessee, while between him and the regular shooting "coper" there are many different grades. As a rule it will be wiser not to take a gun when the terms asked are such as would give a large profit to the lessor, for there are plenty of good men really prepared to put down their share of the expenses, and as long

as they are insured against being further out of pocket, they delight in the responsibilities of the management of a shooting: these, however, are the gentlemen who should exercise the greatest caution in selecting their "guns," and not settle rashly with just the first offerer that comes, for shooting is in such demand that any good fellow need have no difficulty in making up his party, although neither side should trust to arrange the matter solely by correspondence. Let the parties make a point of meeting several times, when a few talks together will throw more light on the suitability of the proposed arrangements than all the letters in the world.

It is wiser to be the last gun to join, for the latest arrival will thus make certain of knowing something about all the number. The bargain once struck, toleration should be the order of the day, while, as long as all concerned act as gentlemen, it should not become a matter of offence if even one of them, like good old Mr. Auldjoe, does wear

a tall black silk hat with pepper and salt trousers on the moor. No matter either if another dons lavender kid gloves and wears the loudest of checks, provided always he be "safe" and does not misbehave himself like Captain Triptolemus Smallgore Spiller. Avoid all "Bessies," and make the keepers and gillies your friends by considerate and sportsmanlike behaviour.

Bachelor parties are more apt to run smoothly than those of married men, for if four Benedicts bring their respective wives to an out-of-the-way shooting-box, and the ladies are young and good-looking, the chances are great that one of the men will soon be paying more attention to the wife of one of his friends than to his own lawful spouse, which will cause squalls to cloud the horizon. A "gun" should not fail to treat his host as if he were really a *bonâ-fide* guest on a visit to him, while especially when on the moor it should not be forgotten to exercise courtesy with sportsmanlike behaviour; for instance, if one "gun" is a stouter,

faster walker than the other, the better man should at once suit his pace to that of his companions.

I have several times tried this plan of taking a gun, and for some seasons was a shareholder in a Shooting Company, of which but the pleasantest reminiscences of good fellowship remain. There were four of us, and for about £200 a year each, which included all expenses, we passed a happy ten weeks in the Highlands. The bag averaged about seven hundred brace of grouse, while black game, partridges, snipe, and hares made up two thousand head, while as to this could be added the same number of rabbits, it will be seen that according to present prices our little company had invested their money wisely and received good dividends in the shape of health, happiness, and sport.

Some thirty years ago a friend of mine was not quite so fortunate, and related to me with much indignation the following story of his adventures. Having answered various advertisements, he at

length settled to complete Mr. Money Bagge's party of six on the well-known Cashbucket shootings. From the day the company assembled at Cashbucket House all went well, for the sport was excellent, while to add to the perfection of the thing, Mr. Bagge had hired a fine steam yacht—for the house was on the sea-shore—and in her were spent many happy "off" days by those too tired to shoot. An ancient billiard table helped to pass the evenings merrily, while as Bagge with two of the party were extra good hands at the game, numerous were the matches that were played, the host always insisting, however, on the stakes being limited to half-crowns.

"Anything higher," said he, "spoils harmony, for if once we begin to increase, we never can tell where it will end, and as some years ago I myself was a very heavy loser under a nearly similar arrangement to the present one, I should indeed be distressed by a recurrence of any such unpleasantness under my own roof."

With such sentiments it was impossible to quarrel, while as far as Mr. Bagge was concerned, the wisdom of his decision was clear, for although a good player, he was not quite a match for either of the others, so while obstinately refusing to accept the points freely offered him, he usually lost with good grace a few half-crowns each evening. Five weeks of the time had flown happily away, and but one more week remained, when the whole party having become mutually pleased with each other, agreed to re-assemble next year. After dinner that day Mr. Bagge expressed his pleasure at hearing of this decision, and rising to his feet, said—

“Now, gentlemen, although I feel very much flattered at your wishing to return, while I need not say how glad I am to have the chance of keeping such a pleasant party together, you must all know I cannot afford to keep this place up on my own hook, therefore, if you are determined to come again, I should like to be able to continue our present staff of keepers and kennel of dogs;

also I should wish to spend a few pounds on improvements, especially in putting up better driving butts and that sort of thing; so for these reasons it would be to our mutual advantage if you could each let me have fifty pounds on account, which would save me any anxiety as to matters financial, for I could not do all I wish for next season's sport without being a considerable sum of money out of pocket."

As this seemed but reasonable, we one and all agreed to the proposition, and the next day Mr. Bagge received five cheques of fifty pounds each, so while his "guns" were busy writing out the documents, he promised them an extra good day's sport on a hitherto untouched beat, and faithfully he kept his word, for the bag was heavy while delightfully "mixed." To celebrate the occasion properly the champagne flowed freely, and, sad to tell, the billiard players did not walk round the table with quite their usual steadiness. After being beaten three games in succession, Bagge lost his

temper, and with a bang of the butt-end of his cue on the floor he angrily exclaimed—

“It’s all this confounded table; it’s neither true nor fast, for I could beat either of you fellows on a real good one. I’ll tell you what I vote we do to-morrow: let us steam into Greenock, take train to Glasgow, and there I will play you each a game of three hundred up for anything you like; so come now, just say if you two have the pluck to say yes to that!”

To this his opponent, on whom the wine had had a greater effect than on any of the others, retorted, “All right, done with you, and you can have a ‘monkey’ on it if you like!” while before the host could reply, the other player joined in to say—“Very well, Bagge, you can have a match on the same terms with me too, but I vote we all go to bed now and think it over in the morning, for really your champagne was so good that we are just a little excited, for as neither of us wish to get the best of the

match, some points must be given you to make it a fair one."

This only increased Bagge's ire. Strong language passed on both sides, and all three waxed so hot that ultimately paper was procured, and a play or pay match was formally made.

The programme was duly carried out, but the Glasgow billiard table made such a great improvement in Bagge's performances, that he easily won both matches, with some outside bets into the bargain, and in a downpour of Greenock rain—which is quite a special sort of rain—the party returned to Cashbucket. On sending them ashore, their host announced his intention of spending the night on board the "Osprey," with a view of settling up some accounts with the crew, so therefore next morning the house party felt no great surprise at not seeing the yacht lying at her moorings, and later, on hearing that Bagge had sent word he had gone on a fishing trip and would be back to dinner, all the "guns" took to the hill. When the evening came,

as the "Osprey" had not returned, the party at Cashbucket sought their beds while wondering what had gone wrong with her. After breakfast the next day the Factor for the estate was announced, and explained to the "guns" he had come by appointment with Bagge to receive the balance of the rent, only £100 having been paid on account. After informing Mr. Factor of their host's absence, and mentioning the fact that they themselves were only paying guests, who had already handed over to Bagge £250 each, it may be guessed with what feelings of dismay they learnt Bagge had signed the lease in the joint names of himself and the first gun who joined him, which he had contrived to do by inventing excuses for delaying the signing until he had secured his premier customer, and that done he had not hesitated to forge the victim's name. Mr. Factor was very polite and expressed much sympathy with us in our trouble, and then, seeing we intended to resist further payment, he took himself off to consult his employer.

Needless to say, the lessee of Cashbucket did not return, while though wires were promptly sent off to stop payment of the cheques for the billiards and the next season's shooting, it was found Bagge had been too quick, for after landing his friends at Cashbucket, he had steamed back to Greenock that same night to turn the cheques into gold the very next day. Eventually law proceedings were commenced against the unfortunate man in whose name the lease stood, and rather than run the risk of an adverse verdict, the amount was made up between the whole five guns. This they did not from any sense of what was fair or proper, but from pure anxiety to avoid the publication of the billiard story, and of how they had one and all been swindled not only at billiards, but also out of the fifty pounds which each had paid in advance for the next season's sport.

Some time afterwards the party heard their late host had daringly steamed for the Cape in the hired yacht, and on arriving safely had sold her

for what she would fetch. The very latest news, however, of those concerned in the matter is to the effect that Mr. Money Bagge was driving a butcher's cart in Kimberley, while his victims continue to rent Cashbucket shootings, and get on well enough without him.

In the story of "Murdoch Campbell's Revenge," one of the most obvious hints is, never forget to take out a shooting licence. This little formality is, however, often ignored by many gentlemen who have not even the excuse of a short purse for their laxness. The sport of the West coast is almost endless in its variety, for setting aside the pursuit of game with the gun, the fish, the otter, the porpoise, the seal, and the wild birds in the time of the migration are ever inviting the attention of the sportsman, and on this beautiful coast a cottage with a boat and a boatman will provide daily amusement at a very small cost. The most plentiful fish are the codling, the whiting, and the coal fish or saithe, whose young are called cuddies.

The saithe, I soon found, were very partial to a fly dressed on an inch hook, with two long strips of white swan feather for wings, a silver body with head and tag of red worsted, and this attached to a couple of lengths of salmon gut will beat all the shop flies, while with it I once landed, helped by a small sharp gaff, a treble event in the shape of three coal fish weighing five pounds each. Three fish, however, appear to be more easily landed than two, as their joint efforts to escape tend to neutralize the violence of their mutual struggles.

The sport with whiting, as long as it lasts, is usually fast and furious, for during the first two days of the arrival of a shoal on the feeding grounds, from ten to fifteen dozen may be put into the boat in a few hours. The third day of the whiting fishing on the same bank is usually spoilt by the quantity of dog fish that have come in pursuit of them, and then often there will be more of these gentry hauled up than delicate whiting. There is one species of dog fish that carries a long





spike on its back a little above the tail; this weapon, which varies from one to two inches in length, is so strong and so sharp that a fish of but five pounds can drive it through the leather of a boot, and when a wound on bare flesh is inflicted it usually swells or festers to an alarming extent. All such customers should be knocked on the head before being brought on board, while it is ever wiser never to permit any sort of "snapping turtle" to be pulled in alive, and a smart rap on the head as the gunwale is reached should settle matters. I have often been surprised at the numbers of big dog fish I have landed on single gut when fishing for whiting, and can only account for it by remembering these latter fish require quick striking, and thus most of the dog fish, having been caught for whiting, were only hooked just far enough inside the mouth to hinder them from reaching the gut with their teeth.

On still sunny days great amusement may be had with a small barrel from which both ends

have been removed, and one replaced with a round of plate glass. If the tub be then fastened to the stern of the boat with the glass end sunk some inches under water, the bed of the ocean can be closely scanned down to a depth of twenty feet. On each side of the man at the tub a very long bamboo pole should lie, one armed with a sharp three-pronged spear, while the other should carry a semi-circular shaped net of small mesh, and this paraphernalia being duly provided, many bright, hot days can be passed in paddling gently round the rocky coast while searching the depths of its remarkably clear waters. The spear will bring skate, flounders, and often other fish to the surface, while the net will fetch up oysters, sea urchins, or various dainties and curiosities of the deep. In this way I speared two heavy fish, one a skate of forty-seven pounds, which was only secured after a hard tussle, while the other was a curious marine monster called the Angler Fish, but known to the natives as the Fishing Frog. It had an enormous

mouth, with a protruding under jaw, armed with sharp teeth. The head was out of all proportion to the thickness of the body, while from the centre of it grew a long tapering tendon, not unlike the thin end of a lady's riding-whip, which terminated in a black tuft hanging over the mouth of the frog. It is said small fish take this tuft for something to eat, and on approaching to inspect it they are at once snapped up by the great jaws below it.

We estimated this fish to scale between twenty and twenty-five pounds, but the immense head, when compared with the small lanky body, made it difficult to judge with accuracy, for that day we had not a steelyard with us, and since then I have often regretted not having had the monster preserved. It did not in the least heed the boat being over it, as for more than an hour I watched in the hope of seeing a fish caught, but to my great regret this did not happen; then when the light began to fail the spear was used.

With regard to the otters, many of them have

sea-side residences as well as river ones, and in the middle of the first and last quarters of the moon, when the neap tides occur, their bolt holes into the sea are left so much uncovered that they have to cross a yard or two of dry ground before reaching the water. On days of this sort it is indeed good sport to row from island to island, and, accompanied by a couple of wiry-haired Skye terriers, visits can be paid to every holt. The dogs should be put into some hole well above the one opening into the sea, while it is not necessary to spend much time at each earth, for if the otter is at home the dogs will be certain to give tongue at once, so a few minutes' silence is a nearly sure indication that the amphibious one is not there. The moment the dogs enter the holt the hunter must stand prepared for a snap shot, while as he is rarely more than twenty yards distant from the bolted otter, but few should escape. For this work I used No. 3 shot, and in one season got sixteen otters.

Now as to the seals I must confess they fairly beat me, for from being a good deal "looked after," they seldom rested on the shore of the mainland, preferring the greater safety of the points of the small islands, while as they can see, hear and smell better than any deer, it was nearly impossible to stalk them, and thus I never got but two, and those as much by good luck as anything else, for they were the results of snap shots made at about a hundred yards: on each occasion the express bullet literally laid their heads open, and killing them stone dead, we were able to row up in time to get the spear into them before they sank. It must be stated these two shots were the only "bullseyes" in many essays, but a seal's head is not a large mark when bobbing about in the water a hundred yards off; also the boat is moving, while the shot has to be taken from the shoulder.

As for the porpoises, at times they appeared in vast shoals, and on these occasions they paid no heed to our craft, often rolling up within a few

yards of our boat when anchored for whiting fishing, and having more than once snapped bullets clean through them, finding they could not be killed stone dead, I gave up the attempt. The natives at times tried to harpoon them, but their weapons were of such a primitive character that the porpoise always wrenched himself free, and not one capture was witnessed by this method. With a well-made harpoon, however, there is no doubt many could be taken. I also think the porpoise might be made to afford excellent sport by hooking them with a spinning herring, and if this lure were attached to some hundreds of yards of stout line wound on to a big reel fixed in the stern of the boat, then indeed some excitement might be forthcoming. The only question is whether they would take the lure, for all the rest could be easily arranged; at any rate, the next time I visit the West Coast, part of my kit will consist of the necessary tackle to give this idea a good trial, while in addition there will also be a sharp harpoon

with barbs that will not draw, and so in one way or another I look forward to some lively times with the porpoises.

In quitting the subject of the wild West Coast I will but urge my readers never to allow feelings of fatigue to tempt them to sit down before a good fire while wet through. This caution is especially given as in these latitudes wettings are so much more frequent than on the East Coast that at last they come to be regarded as the normal state of affairs and are despised; unless, however, wet things be at once changed for dry ones, rheumatism cannot for long be set at defiance.

The chapter on Speyside shows how there are but few shooting agents who will not freely promise an intending renter an average of a fish a day per rod on any fishing placed in their hands for letting, and it is undoubtedly harder to get details of past sport in the fishing world than in the shooting one. Even if the name of the last tenant be forthcoming, while application to him brings but a poor

report, the agent has but to shrug his shoulders while he says—"Well, sir, there are anglers and anglers, as you know, and from what we hear, Mr. Last neither fished well nor perseveringly, and we are sure it would be quite different with you, sir!"

Then there are ever the cries of an unusually bad season, with either too much water, or not water enough, and what with one thing and another, the fishery lessee is more often doomed to disappointment than the moor renter. Early spring angling in Scotland is difficult to get, for the angler's choice is limited to the following nine rivers, which are named in the order of merit generally conceded to them: the Dee, Helmsdale, Garry of Loch Oich, Thurso, Brora, Tay, Tummell, Naver, and Halladale. The Spey, Lyon, Teith, and Tweed also yield moderate early sport, but neither of these will ever be of much account until there is an alteration for the better in the Fishery Laws. The February and March angling on such rivers as the Shin,

Oykel, Carron, Conon, Beaul, and Ness, is nearly *nil*, although from the middle of April all these rivers commence to give sport.

Such rivers as the Deveron, Ugie, Ythan, Findhorn, Nairn, North and South Esk are practically worthless until the nets are taken off. On the West Coast of Scotland, strange to say, though there are fully a score of good big rivers, with some hundred more of a smaller size, there is not a single early one in the lot, although at any time after April excellent sport may be had in most of them, especially in the Laxford, Inver, Kirkaig, Shiel, Lochy, Spean, Awe, and Orchy.

When on a fishing trip, it is always as well to parade your gillie, to see that he really has with him all requisites for the day, and attention to such a little detail will often save loss of time and temper.

Plovers' eggs can be found more easily by watching the birds using a field than by walking it up and down many times. If the seeker hide

himself for such a period as to make the peewits think he has departed, which does not require very long, and then gradually show himself again, the hens with nests will be seen to rise silently and steal off at great speed to a distance ere they utter their pretty cry. Those birds that rise to circle about over the place they started from, the while shrieking loudly and incessantly, are cocks, or hens without nests.

As soon as the egg hunter has marked the places from which the nesting hens have risen, he can walk directly to them, and if the marking has been well done, he will go straight to each nest. At first it will be difficult to mark more than one or two hens at a time, but practice will soon render the matter easier, and I have seen a man used to this method of finding eggs walk without faltering to seven different nests.

With regard to the events told of in "A Month at Strathmaacoe," had space permitted they might have been more voluminous, and I have been

puzzled in selecting matter which appeared most likely to interest my readers.

I hope no one will think the worse of me for slaying the hill fox, as in some parts of the Highlands they are far too numerous, while where there are no rabbits great is the havoc they work amongst ptarmigan, grouse, and hares; for though reynard will condescend to eat rats, mice, and moles, he much prefers something more substantial.

When writing of foxes, a strange incident is recalled to my mind which happened during a stay at Carim Lodge in the Ochill Hills of Perthshire. The keeper having caught a cub in the spring, kept him chained up in a kennel made out of an old cask. One morning the fox was missing, and it was seen he had drawn the staple, and gone off with chain and collar fastened to him. The keeper was sure that with this appanage attached to him he could not run far, so he took his retriever to the kennel, and after showing him the deserted abode sent him in pursuit of the missing pet, while

as fox and dog were good friends, he had no fear of the former coming to harm. After a short absence the retriever came back, holding one end of the chain in his mouth while he led the fugitive once more to his kennel.

The sad accidents told of at Strathmaacoe are but two more examples of that carelessness with firearms which annually claims fresh victims, and I have come to the conclusion that all preaching of safety except to mere boys is useless; for if a grown-up man is such a fool as not to be able to recognise for himself that the weapon capable of killing a deer or a grouse will equally as well kill the bearer or his friends, then all the talking in the world will not avail to make him wiser, and such a one is best given a wide berth.

With reference to Loch Leven, I can strongly advise any one wishing to put away a few spare days to give it a trial, and in my opinion August is the best month, for though sport may not be quite so good as earlier in the season, the fishing

club "competitions" have then come to an end, which allows of a boat being secured without the necessity of engaging it very long beforehand.

It is at times quite extraordinary what good sport may be had at driven grouse by but two or three shooters, and with the latter number I once helped to secure fifty-eight brace in a few hours at Huntly Lodge, Aboyne. This good bag for Scotland was made by the aid of seven beaters, four of whom acted as drivers, whilst the other three were posted near the occupied butts in such positions as were best calculated to turn the birds to the guns, and Mr. Dyke's one gun grouse drive well exemplifies how much good generalship will help to swell the bag.

Although, perhaps, enough has already been written here on the subject of deer-stalking, I cannot refrain from relating an odd adventure which occurred to me at Corrour. I had left the lodge early, and after making a circuitous round of some twenty miles found myself in the dusk of an

October evening on the Ben Alder march. The road home took me past old Allan McCallum's cottage on Loch Ossian; as this was the half-way house, on arriving there at about seven o'clock I was tempted to sit down by his peat fire and take a cup of tea, and once seated I lingered on, glad to rest while gossiping deer with the veteran stalker. Somewhere about nine o'clock I started to finish my journey to Corrour, which was some five miles distant, while it must be stated that this was then one of the least inhabited and most desolate parts of Scotland.

It was a pitch-dark night, so much so that at times I was forced to search for the track with my stick as if I had been a blind man, which to an already tired traveller was but a slow process. Hence when half the journey had been made, I sat down on a dry heather bank by the side of the ditch which drained the track, and was proceeding to fill a pipe when suddenly right from under me there came a deep groan.

Needless to say this caused me to spring to my feet with a bound, as I exclaimed—

“Who’s there? Get up, whoever you are, and let me have a look at you.”

To this exhortation a voice replied from the bottom of the ditch:—

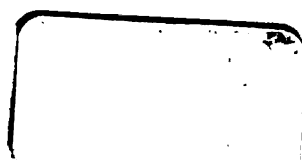
“Eh, mon! we are just poor tinkers who left Fort William this morning and have lost our way.”

Then there emerged from the peat hag three dim figures, which I learnt were Mr., Mrs. and Master Tinker. Poor creatures they were of the tramp tribe, and worn out with the fatigues of their thirty mile journey, they had laid down to sleep in the dry peat of the ditch, whilst I by strange chance had seated myself right over them. They had no reason however to regret their awakening, for I took the whole lot on to Corrour, where my old friend the late Henry Spencer Lucy made them happy with hare soup, roast beef, and whisky toddy, followed by a shake-down in the straw loft.

Having now come to the end of my tether, it remains but to hope I have succeeded in making these recollections of Highland sport readable and amusing, but whatever the verdict may be, my very best thanks are due to the many eminent sportsmen who, themselves possessing far better knowledge of the subjects herein discussed, have yet been kind enough to support me in the publication of this book.

FINIS.

1/11/6



1/11/6

